



THE MEANING OF COMMUNAL EATING ACCORDING TO JESUS AND THE THEOLOGICAL-MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR MINISTRY IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

Eating together has become a tradition and custom deeply embedded in almost all ethnicities, races, and cultures in Indonesian society. Eating together is typically done during traditional and religious celebrations, and has even become a routine and programmed activity of churches. Eating together aims to foster intimacy, friendship, and family ties, fostering mutual tolerance. Sometimes, this purpose has faded, with eating together becoming simply a shared meal and then being finished. In the Gospels, Jesus also shared a meal with tax collectors and sinners, with the purpose of proclaiming the message of forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation. Jesus shared more than just a meal; it also had theological and missiological significance. The church must return to the principles of sitting down to a meal like Jesus'.

Keywords: tradition; eating together; theology; missiology.

INTRODUCTION

Shared meals have become a distinctive feature and tradition within Indonesian society. Almost every region has its own practice or culture of communal eating that is associated with various celebrations, such as religious festivities or thanksgiving events, carried out either within families or in the wider community. This practice of eating together has even become a routine activity frequently observed among Christians in churches. Many churches include communal meals as part of their annual programs, making it a continuous activity. Typically, after worship services, congregants are invited to participate in a communal meal organized by the church as a form of fellowship and togetherness, enabling members to get to know one another and strengthen bonds of intimacy. Moreover, shared meals are not only conducted on Sundays after worship services; some churches also hold communal meals following midweek gatherings, such as evening prayer meetings, cell group fellowships, household services, men's fellowships, women's

fellowships, or youth services. These gatherings may take place alternately in the homes of church members or even in restaurants.

The communal meals organized and programmed by the church are generally intended to strengthen fellowship and nurture familial bonds as the body of Christ among the congregation, to serve one another around the dining table, and even to encourage one another in faith. However, in practice, such communal meals often become merely another church program, reduced to routine and symbolic custom, as the true purpose of the event is not fulfilled. Gaps and divisions among congregants may still persist, either because the meals are not well-prepared or because they are perceived merely as a traditional activity to fulfill the church's program. As a result, the deeper meaning of shared meals in the church context is often lost. Yet, church-based communal meals certainly have biblical foundations, particularly centered on the example of Jesus, including in the practice of eating together. Therefore, the original intent and meaning of communal meals carry theological and missiological weight, which must be implemented and preserved for the sake of fellowship and for the greater mission, rather than being reduced to a mere social event.

Theologically and missiologically, communal meals must be understood in light of the meals shared by Jesus. Chester emphasizes that throughout His ministry on earth, Jesus often spent His time eating and drinking with many people. Accordingly, His acts of evangelism and discipleship also took place around the dining table, accompanied by a few fish, bread, and wine. *"Jesus spent his time eating and drinking – a lot of his time. His mission strategy was a long meal, stretching into the evening. He did evangelism and discipleship round a table with some grilled fish, a loaf of bread, and a pitcher of wine."*¹ The meals shared by Jesus served as a means of fostering friendship and carrying out His mission of salvation with tax collectors and sinners. Chester further emphasizes that... *"This is why eating and drinking were so important in the mission of Jesus: they were a sign of his friendship with tax collectors and sinners. His 'excess' of food and 'excess' of grace are linked"*.² Shared meals became profoundly significant in the missional ministry of Jesus because they symbolized friendship with sinners. Through such meals, Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God, which led people to repentance and salvation. Many who joined

¹ Tim Chester, *A Meal With Jesus: Discovering Grace, Community & Mission Around the Table* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2011), 13.

² Ibid., 14.

these meals came to believe in His teaching and became His faithful followers. Yet, this very purpose has been lost and is no longer practiced by many churches today. Churches and congregations generally emphasize only the activity of eating itself, while neglecting the primary purpose of the shared meal.

The Tradition of Communal Eating in Indonesia

In essence, the tradition of communal meals in Indonesia represents one of the nation's cultural heritages that has long existed and has been preserved by various ethnic groups, races, and regions, each with their own unique expressions. This tradition has also been integrated into the practices of believers and the church. A communal meal can be understood as an expression of fellowship among members of the body of Christ. More broadly, however, communal meals should not merely be regarded as a gathering for social interaction or for creating a convivial atmosphere, but rather as an opportunity and medium for proclaiming the Gospel and engaging in mission.

The Concept of the Tradition of Communal Meals

Tradition is generally identified with customs or ancient practices that continue to be observed up to the present day. Many religious ceremonies are carried out on the basis of traditions or habits that have been passed down from generation to generation. Therefore, tradition is not only related to religious matters but also encompasses culture and customary practices. Yosef notes that tradition is essentially a process of communication or the transmission of faith from one generation to the next, as well as among contemporaries.³ The Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI) defines *tradition* in two ways: "(1) Customs or practices handed down from generation to generation (from ancestors) that are still observed in society; (2) The view or assumption that established ways are considered the best and most correct."⁴ Tjaya then formulates tradition as "a set of practices and beliefs that are socially transmitted from the past, or the inheritance of beliefs or customs from one generation to the next."⁵

³Yosef Lalu, *Makna Hidup Dalam Terang Iman Katolik 2* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2010), 43.

⁴*Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*, offline, s.v. "tradisi".

⁵ Thomas Hidya Tjaya, SJ, "Hermeneutika Tradisi dan Kebenaran," dalam *Menggagas Manusia Sebagai Penafsir*, ed. Th. Hidya Tyaya, SJ & J. Sudarminta SJ (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2005), 69.

In general, Indonesian society regards traditions as an inheritance from the ancestors that must be preserved and continually practiced, partly because of the belief that misfortune may occur if these traditions are neglected. This is why many religious traditions of a ritualistic nature are still observed today. For instance, the tradition of giving thanks for blessings of health and protection, practiced by the Sangihe and Talaud ethnic communities in Bitung, North Sulawesi, is known as the Tulude ritual.⁶ In addition, there is also a tradition commonly practiced by the Javanese community during the transition to the Javanese New Year, in which they perform the “Tirakatan” ritual on the eve of 1 Suro (1 Muharram).⁷ Muslims in Indonesia also observe the “Nyekar” tradition, which is practiced every year prior to the month of Ramadan. Similarly, the people of Bangka Belitung have the tradition of “Sedekah Ruah”.

The Practice of Communal Meal Traditions

Communal meals are usually held in connection with traditional ceremonies, community events, or special family occasions. Therefore, the organizers or facilitators of such meals may vary. When the communal meal is associated with a community event, the local government or relevant institutions generally serve as the organizers. In contrast, when it is related to traditional or religious ceremonies, the responsibility usually lies with the traditional leader or an appointed ceremonial committee. Thus, whoever initiates the communal meal assumes full responsibility for the overall execution of the event.

In general, everyone is permitted to participate in communal meals, whether organized by the government or by traditional leaders. However, when such meals are hosted by a particular family, only relatives and close kin are invited to take part. For instance, the *Makan Bajamba* tradition from the Minangkabau community is a ritual communal meal typically held during special family occasions such as weddings, circumcision ceremonies, or thanksgiving events. In this tradition, only individuals who share a blood relation with the host family are invited to join the *Makan Bajamba*.

⁶Alamsyah Djohan, “Ritual Tulude, Tradisi Ungkapan Syukur - Ragam,” http://www.indosiar.com/ragam/ritual-tulude-tradisi-ungkapan-syukur_84245.html diakses 24 Juni 2014.

⁷ “Mengenal Tradisi Malam Satu Suro Ditanah Jawa-Ragam Budaya Indonesia” <http://caswaterpark.com/mengenal-tradisi-malam-satu-suro-ditanah-jawa-ragam-budaya-indonesia> diakses 24 Juni 2014.

Ethnological Review

The cultural and ethnic diversity in Indonesia makes the nation rich in traditions and heritage, including the tradition of communal meals. Each ethnic group and region has its own characteristics in practicing communal dining traditions. The following are several examples of communal meal traditions in Indonesia:

First, the *Binarundak* Tradition in North Sulawesi⁸ The Bolaang Mongondow community in North Sulawesi has a tradition that is always observed during the Islamic celebration of Idul Fitri. This tradition is known as Binarundak, a communal event of grilling nasi jaha together. Nasi jaha is a traditional food from North Sulawesi, consisting of glutinous rice mixed with coconut milk, roasted inside a bamboo tube lined with banana leaves. The rice is roasted in open spaces, such as fields or along the streets, and once cooked, it is shared and eaten communally. Binarundak is practiced particularly by members of the Bolaang Mongondow community returning home from migration. The event also serves as an occasion for fellowship and reunion among family members and friends who have not met for a long time. Meanwhile, Pengucapan is a thanksgiving tradition of the Minahasan people in North Sulawesi, held in gratitude for the abundant agricultural harvests such as rice, cloves, and other produce. The celebration typically takes place in June or July each year. Pengucapan functions as a communal feast where families, congregations, and entire communities gather to share meals together. It has become a people's festival marked by large-scale communal dining. Essentially, "Pengucapan" is a celebration of thanksgiving through shared meals and has been preserved as a long-standing tradition among the Minahasan people.

Second, *Makan Patita* in Maluku⁹ The people of Maluku are familiar with the communal dining tradition called Makan Patita. Makan Patita is held as an expression of gratitude for the blessings they have received throughout the year. This tradition also serves as a means of togetherness and closeness with one another. Makan Patita is usually held twice a year, on January 2 and in December. However, there are several villages in Maluku, such as Oma Village, that hold the traditional Makan Patita only at certain times. All traditional foods and dishes are brought out and laid out during this communal meal. The types of food served are also many, including yellow rice and coconut rice, various side

⁸ Alamsyah Johan, "Tradisi Binarundak Tandai Puncak Lebaran," http://indosiar.com/ragam/tradisi-binarundak-tandai-puncak-lebaran_76047.html diakses 24 Juni 2014.

⁹ Novita, "Makan Patita, Tradisi Makan Bersama Rakyat Maluku," diakses 13 Mei 2014.

dishes, vegetables, and traditional cakes from Oma Village. Anyone present at the Makan Patita event may taste all the food provided.

Third, *Megibung* in Bali¹⁰ The *Megibung* tradition became the communal dining tradition of the Balinese people, introduced by I Gusti Agung Anglurah Ketut Karangasem, the King of Karangasem, around 1692 AD. Without distinction of caste, social status, or gender, everyone can sit in a circle of four to eight people to take part in this communal meal. One circle is called one *sela*, and usually in a communal dining event there are more than dozens of *sela*. Each *sela* is led by a *pepara*, who is responsible for gradually serving the side dishes on top of the mound of rice. This tradition is usually still practiced in relation to various types of Hindu traditional and religious ceremonies, such as the tooth-filing ceremony, children's *otonan* (birthday ceremony), weddings, *ngaben* (cremation), *pemelaspan* (purification of buildings or objects), and *piodalan* at the temple. *Megibung* begins with cooking various traditional dishes together, which are then served.

Fourth, *Bakar Batu* in Papua¹¹. Bakar Batu is one of the important traditions in Papua. Usually, the Bakar Batu ceremony is held as an expression of gratitude, to celebrate religious holidays, weddings, welcoming special guests, and for peace. This communal dining event is called Bakar Batu because the cooking process uses heated stones that have already been burned. There are three stages carried out in the Bakar Batu feast.

1. The first stage is preparation, namely gathering firewood and stones to be used for cooking. Usually, the stones used are river stones or large stones, taken with wooden tongs.
2. The second stage is shooting the pig that has been prepared. The pig will be shot with an arrow by the tribal chief, and only with a single arrow. If the pig does not die immediately with the first shot, then the Papuan people believe that the event to be held will not be successful.
3. The third stage is making a large hole in the ground and preparing the food that will be placed in the Bakar Batu. Usually, the men will dig the hole, while the women will cut and clean the pig that has died.

¹⁰Wayan Sunarta, "Megibung, Tradisi Makan Bersama Penuh Aturan Ketat," www.balebengong.net/sosial-budaya/budaya/2009/01/22/megibung-tradisi-makan-bersama-penuh-aturan-ketat.html diakses 12 Maret 2014, bdk "Megibung – Tradisi Makan Bersama," iendro.blogspot.com/2012/10/megibung-makan-bersama.html diakses 25 Maret 2014.

¹¹ Mutya Hanifah, "Makan Besar ala Papua di Pesta Bakar Batu," <http://travel.okezone.com/read/2013/02/23/408/766496/makan-besar-ala-papua-di-pesta-bakar-batu> diakses 24 Juni 2014.

The cooking process with Bakar Batu usually takes around 60 to 90 minutes. While waiting for the food to be cooked, worship is also carried out. With banana leaves as the base, the food is then distributed to each tribe that is already sitting in groups.

The fifth, the *Penti* ceremony in East Nusa Tenggara.¹² The Manggarai people have a tradition called the *Penti* ceremony, a ritual held as an expression of gratitude for the harvest that has been received. The *Penti* ceremony is also held as a request for protection and harmony in future life. Usually, the *Penti* ceremony is performed every October or November. This ceremony is also accompanied by traditional rituals, blessings, cultural performances, and communal meals. The main dish served at the *Penti* ceremony is *nasi kolo* or bamboo rice, which is a traditional food of the Manggarai people. *Kolo* is rice roasted in young bamboo about 30 cm long. The way to cook *nasi kolo* is by putting rice, water, and spices into the bamboo, closing the end with banana leaves, and roasting it for about 30 minutes.

THE CONCEPT OF THE MEANING OF SHARED MEALS IN THE BIBLE

Jesus, in His ministry, not only taught His disciples, but also gave opportunities to others who wanted to listen to His teaching. Wherever Jesus was, He always used the opportunity to teach. Jesus taught many people and was also willing to associate with tax collectors and sinners, including being willing to sit down and eat together with them. Blomberg says that this action of Jesus is absorbed in the tradition in the Synoptic Gospels: *The theme of Jesus's table fellowship with sinners permeates every layer of the Synoptic tradition. In Mark 2:13-17 and parallels, Jesus calls the tax collector Levi to be one of his disciples and then attends a party with Levi's associates. In Mark 6:30-44 and 8:1-10 and parallels, he feeds the five thousand and the four thousand, crowds that would have included very heterogeneous groupings of people.*¹³ Furthermore, Chester emphasizes that in His ministry, much of Jesus' time was spent eating and drinking. According to him, the meals that Jesus shared were His mission strategy in reaching out to sinners and tax collectors.¹⁴

¹² 'Kolo, Makanan Khas Tradisional Manggarai,' *Visit Flobaroma* <http://wisata.nttprov.go.id/index.php/2014-01-20-04-43-22/2014-01-20-07-39-48/manggarai/420-kolo-makanan-khas-tradisional-manggarai> diakses 24 Juni 2014.

¹³ Craig L. Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness: Jesus' Meals With Sinners* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 20.

¹⁴ Ada tiga hal dalam Perjanjian Baru yang menggambarkan Yesus adalah Anak Manusia. Pertama, Anak Manusia datang bukan untuk dilayani melainkan untuk melayani dan untuk memberikan nyawa-Nya menjadi tebusan bagi banyak orang (Markus 10:45). Kedua, Anak Manusia datang untuk mencari dan menyelamatkan yang hilang (Lukas 19:10). Ketiga, Anak Manusia datang untuk makan dan minum (Lukas 7:34). Pernyataan

Eating together was Jesus' method in achieving His purpose of seeking and saving the lost. Chester writes, "*His mission strategy was a long meal, stretching into the evening, He did evangelism and discipleship round a table with some grilled fish, a loaf of bread, and a pitcher of wine.*"¹⁵ Here are several occasions of Jesus eating together recorded in the Gospels.

1. Jesus Eats With Tax Collectors and Sinners.

The Gospels record many events of Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners. The following are some events of Jesus eating with sinners:

First, Jesus ate at the house of Matthew the tax collector (Matthew 9:9–13; Mark 2:13–17; Luke 5:27–32). The Synoptic Gospels all record the presence of Jesus at the banquet held by Matthew the tax collector (Matt. 9:9; Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27). Luke records another name for Matthew, namely Levi. And Mark provides additional information that Levi was the son of Alphaeus. The use of the name "Matthew" in Matthew 9:9 is significant in the Gospel of Matthew. Some interpreters argue that this Levi, or Matthew, is the disciple of the Lord Jesus who is listed as James son of Alphaeus. This Levi is also considered the author of the Gospel of Matthew. It is thought that the name Matthew, which means "gift of Yahweh," was the Christian name given to Levi after his conversion, similar to how the name Saul was changed to Paul.¹⁶ There are two themes in this passage. The first is Jesus' calling of Matthew, or Levi the tax collector (Matt. 9:9; Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27). The second is the controversy surrounding Jesus' willingness to eat with tax collectors and sinners (Matt. 9:11; Mark 2:16; Luke 5:30). Matthew and Mark write that after Jesus called Levi, he immediately stood up and followed Him. Luke gives additional detail regarding Levi's response. Luke 5:28 records how Levi the tax collector left everything and followed Jesus. Matthew, or Levi, was a Jew appointed by the Romans to oversee a tax booth. His duty was to collect taxes from the people and traders passing through the city. Tax collecting was considered the most despised and shameful occupation by the Jews.

Tax collectors were often identified with thieves. This was because they frequently collected taxes that were far higher than what was actually required. The *Word Biblical*

pertama dan kedua merupakan tujuan-Nya datang ke dunia, sedangkan pernyataan ketiga merupakan cara bagaimana Dia mencapai tujuan-Nya. Lihat Tim Chester, *A Meal with Jesus*, 12-13.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Lihat B. J. Boland, *Injil Lukas* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1996), 132 bdk Donald A. Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 1-13* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), S.237, Word Biblical Commentary 33A.

Commentary describes tax collectors as greedy, self-serving people who were regarded as parasites: “Tax collectors, or tax farmers, in that culture were despised as greedy, self-serving, and parasitic. They grew rich at the expense of the poor by extorting from them more than was required by their superiors in order to fill their own pockets.”¹⁷ Tax collectors were granted the right to collect customs duties from a certain district, which were auctioned off to interested parties and awarded to those who placed the highest bid. The duties they would receive were quite substantial, because in addition to the mandatory taxes that they had to remit,¹⁸ There existed a category of obligatory taxation that had to be paid, which included road tolls, city tolls, bridge tolls, ship tolls, as well as levies on several basic commodities such as clothing, fish, wheat, oil, livestock, and grain. Any surplus amount collected beyond the fixed rate determined by the Roman government became the personal income of the tax collectors themselves. This system provided opportunities for exploitation, as tax collectors frequently engaged in fraudulent practices by inflating fees for their own gain. Furthermore, the deep resentment of the Jewish community toward tax collectors stemmed from their perceived collaboration with the Roman authorities. They were regarded as traitors who enriched themselves at the expense of the nation’s suffering under foreign rule. Consequently, tax collectors were socially marginalized and classified among the ranks of “sinners.” They were excluded from holding public office, their testimonies were deemed inadmissible in legal contexts, and they were even prohibited from participating in synagogue worship.

The banquet held at Matthew’s house took place after he responded to Jesus’ call. This was not an ordinary meal, but rather a great banquet (Luke 5:29). Matthew organized this banquet as an expression of honor and joy for having been called by Jesus. Not only were Jesus and His disciples invited, but Matthew also invited other tax collectors and sinners to sit together and share in the meal. The term “eat” in Matthew 9:10, in the phrase “Jesus ate at Matthew’s house” (cf. NKJV: *sat at the table in the house*; NIV: *was having dinner at Matthew’s house*; NASB: *reclining at the table*; KJV: *sat at meat in the house*), uses the Greek word ἀνακειμένους, which means “reclining at table,” reflecting

¹⁷ Donald A. Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 1-13*, S.238.

¹⁸ Ada tiga macam pajak wajib yang berlaku pada masa itu. Pertama adalah pajak tanah yang harus dibayarkan sebesar sepersepuluh hasil gandum ditambah dengan seperlima hasil buah-buahan atau anggur yang ditanam di tanah itu. Kedua adalah pajak pendapatan yang berjumlah satu persen dari jumlah pendapatan seseorang. Dan ketiga adalah pajak kepala yang harus dibayarkan oleh setiap laki-laki yang berumur 14 sampai 65 tahun, dan wanita sebesar 12 sampai 65 tahun. Lihat William Barclay, *Matius Pasal 1-10*, 535-536.

the Roman custom of reclining while dining.¹⁹ This reclining posture was usually practiced by an invited guest who was regarded as honorable. Meanwhile, Mark 2:15 and Luke 5:29 both employ the term **κατάκειμαι** (Mark: *κατακεῖσθαι*, Luke: *κατακείμενοι*), which denotes the state of lying down, a word often used to describe either someone who is ill or someone reclining on a couch while eating.²⁰ Essentially, both terms describe the customary Roman posture during meals.

The presence of Jesus and His disciples in Matthew's house drew the attention of many, particularly the Pharisees. For the Jews, sharing a meal signified closeness and intimacy—a sign of deep fellowship. The Pharisees and teachers of the Law grumbled and reproved the disciples, asking why Jesus would choose to eat with tax collectors and sinners (Matt. 9:11; Mark 2:16; Luke 5:30). They regarded table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners as defiling. Nolland observes that the Pharisees exhibited a strong tendency toward separatism. They would extend hospitality (in this case, participation in a banquet) only to those who belonged to their own circle. They would not associate with, let alone dine alongside, those deemed unclean or non-Jews. Pharisaism had strong separatist tendencies, and because of the prominence in Pharisaic piety of food and ritual cleanliness rules, Pharisees would only accept hospitality from one another. By analogy with the avoiding of communicable ritual uncleanness, the Pharisees considered it necessary also to avoid contamination from contact with the morally suspect elements of Jewish society (and Gentiles).²¹ By demanding an explanation from Jesus regarding His actions, the Pharisees were, in effect, equating Him with those who reclined at the table with Him. Jesus' response, however, revealed the very purpose of His coming into the world: to call the sick and the sinners. His acceptance of Matthew the tax collector's invitation to a banquet, and His willingness to share a meal with them, demonstrates how profoundly different Jesus was from other rabbis of His time, who refused any association with tax collectors. In doing so, Jesus dismantled the walls of separation that excluded tax collectors from the religious community. Those who were never invited to a meal were now given an invitation; those who were typically despised now received genuine

¹⁹ Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan Baker Books, 2000), S.50, Baker's Greek New Testament Library 4.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, S.218.

²¹ John Nolland, *Word Biblical Commentary: Luke 1:1-9:20*, S.246.

acceptance; and those who were formerly marginalized from society now found themselves seated at the same table with Jesus and His disciples.

Secondly, Jesus stayed at the house of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10). Jericho was a renowned city and counted among the wealthiest. Because of its prosperity, Jericho became one of the largest taxation centers in Palestine. It was described as a “little paradise,” adorned with palm trees and rose gardens. Herod the Great and Archelaus further enhanced the beauty of Jericho by constructing a winter palace, a theater, and a hippodrome. Hendriksen emphasizes that: *Even before the reign of Herod I Jericho was already “a little paradise,” with its palm trees, rose gardens, etc. Herod the Great and his son Archelaus had made it even more beautiful. A grand winter palace had been built there, also a theater and a hippodrome. Some of the streets were lined with sycamore trees. The climate was delightful.*²² In this city lived a wealthy chief tax collector named Zacchaeus. The name *Zacchaeus* derives from the Hebrew word *Zakkai* (cf. Ezra 2:9; Nehemiah 7:14), which means “pure.” The meaning of this name, however, appears to stand in stark contrast to the occupation he held as a chief tax collector. Yet, when viewed from the perspective of his name, it is evident that Zacchaeus was indeed a Jew.²³ Zacchaeus, upon hearing that Jesus was passing through the city of Jericho (v. 1), desired to see Him. This desire, however, required a degree of sacrifice. Not only was he hindered by his short stature (v. 3), but he was also obstructed by the crowd that prevented him from approaching Jesus directly. Nevertheless, verse 4 records that Zacchaeus did not despair; instead, he ran ahead of the crowd and climbed a sycamore tree. His sole purpose was to see “who Jesus was” (v. 3). Zacchaeus’s eagerness to encounter Jesus was likely influenced by reports he had heard about Jesus, particularly that He was willing to receive tax collectors and sinners.²⁴ His need to encounter Jesus was fulfilled in verse 5. Not only did he succeed in meeting Jesus, but it was Jesus Himself who took the initiative by calling Zacchaeus by name and urging him to come down. Even more striking, Jesus declared something that caused the other Jews to grumble: *“Today I must stay at your house”* (v. 5). This statement implied that Jesus intended to lodge overnight in Zacchaeus’s home. Such an action was profoundly countercultural, for to stay in the house of a tax collector—one who was

²² William Hendriksen, Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), S.851, New Testament Commentary 11.

²³ B. J. Boland, *Injil Lukas*, 444.

²⁴ Ibid. bdk William Barclay, *Lukas*, 345–346.

considered a sinner (v. 7)—was regarded as ritually defiling and would never have been undertaken by a Jew who considered himself a rabbi.

There is no explanation as to how Jesus knew Zacchaeus's name. However, the word "must" (δεῖ) used by Luke signifies not only necessity and obligation but also conveys the sense of alignment with the divine plan and purpose. The statement "*I must stay at your house*" (δεῖ με μένειν) demonstrates that, in order to fulfill God's plan, Jesus had to remain (μένω) in Zacchaeus's house. Likewise, the expression "*today*" (σήμερον) reflects the eschatological urgency embodied in the presence of Jesus.²⁵ The acceptance extended by Jesus brought about a total transformation in Zacchaeus's life (v. 8). He resolved to give half of his possessions to the poor and to restore fourfold whatever he had extorted from others. This response reflects Zacchaeus's gratitude for the kindness of Jesus. The two commitments he made illustrate his new orientation: generosity, by giving away half of his wealth, and accountability, by making restitution for his past wrongdoings. Zacchaeus's encounter with Jesus did not merely allow him to see (ἰδεῖν) Jesus but also to know Him personally. This is evident in the way he addressed Jesus as "Lord" (κύριε), which indicates that he had found the answer to his earlier question (v. 3). Jesus is indeed Lord. For those who acknowledge and believe that Jesus is Lord, salvation is theirs (v. 9). Thus, the mission of Jesus is fulfilled: to seek and to save the lost (v. 10).²⁶

Third, Jesus Dines at the House of Simon When He Is Anointed by a Woman (Matthew 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9; John 12:1–8). Upon closer examination, it becomes apparent that Matthew 26:6–13 is dependent on the account in Mark 14:3–9, as both pericopes display significant similarities. Meanwhile, John 12:1–8 likely reflects the same story tradition as Matthew and Mark, though it appears more influenced by Luke's narrative. In addition, there is a difference in the placement of the event between Matthew and Mark, on the one hand, and John, on the other. While Matthew and Mark situate the account prior to the Passover meal, John positions it even earlier. Some interpreters suggest that this difference in placement serves Matthew and Mark's literary purpose of contrasting the woman's act of anointing Jesus with Judas's impending act of betrayal.²⁷ While Jesus was in Bethany, He dined at the house of Simon the Leper. It is possible that the

²⁵ John Nolland, *Word Biblical Commentary: Luke 18:35–24:53*, S.905.

²⁶ Tim Chester, *A Meal with Jesus*, 12–13 bdk Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, S. Lk 19:1 yang menuliskan *Zacchaeus's access to God's blessing has been gained through faith. Not only that, but Jesus' mission has been fulfilled.*

²⁷ *Life Application Study Bible NKJV* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1993), 1795.

designation “the Leper” was merely a title or appellation attached to Simon. For if Simon were still suffering from leprosy, it would have been highly unlikely that the disciples and the woman would have been willing to enter his house. In the Greek text, the epithet “the Leper” (τοῦ λεπροῦ) appears in a pronominal form, functioning as a substantive descriptor. It is therefore plausible that Simon had once been afflicted with leprosy but was healed by Jesus. In this light, the banquet may be understood as Simon’s act of thanksgiving, expressed by hosting Jesus for a meal in his home—much in the same way that Matthew the tax collector once did.

Leprosy was closely associated with ritual impurity, and those afflicted with the disease were required to live in isolation. This was not only because the disease was viewed as repulsive, but also because it was widely regarded as a divine curse. A person suffering from leprosy was considered to be one who had fallen under God’s judgment.²⁸ Jesus’ willingness to dine in the house of Simon demonstrates His love and acceptance toward those who were marginalized by society, namely those who were regarded as having already received divine punishment and curse. In any case, what Jesus did signifies His gracious reception of the outcasts. Similar to the account of Jesus dining at the house of Levi the tax collector, Mark employs the term *κατακεῖσθαι*, while Matthew uses *ἀνακειμένου*. Both expressions indicate that Jesus was treated as an honored guest at the banquet. The text does not clarify whether Simon was still afflicted with leprosy or had already been healed. Nevertheless, the central focus of this pericope is not on the banquet in the house of Simon the leper, but rather on the theological significance of the event that took place therein.

While Jesus was reclining at the table, a woman came and poured costly oil upon His head (v. 7). The anointing of the head was a customary practice in that period, more so than the anointing of the feet. Typically, such anointing was performed prior to a communal meal. However, in Mark 14:3 the act of anointing takes place while Jesus was in the midst of eating. Another deviation from the prevailing cultural custom concerns the timing of the anointing: it was generally associated with festive or celebratory occasions, rather than ordinary days. Interpreters have argued that the anointing of Jesus in these pericopes bears a messianic significance. The woman’s action functions as a symbolic act of

²⁸ Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman III, ed., *Kamus Gambaran Alkitab*, 552-553.

anointing Jesus as the Messiah.²⁹ How was it possible for the woman to enter Simon's house? In the social customs of that period, when a banquet was held, it was common for others to be permitted to observe, especially if the honored guest was a rabbi. This may explain how the woman could freely enter the dining area. The text does not provide her name. What is clear, however, is that she anointed the head of Jesus with costly oil (Matt. 26:7; Mark 14:4; John 12:3). Jesus commended the woman's action, even though the disciples regarded the anointing with such expensive oil as wasteful (Matt. 26:8–10; Mark 14:4–6; John 12:4–7).

Fourth, Jesus Dines at the House of Simon the Pharisee and Is Anointed by a Sinful Woman (Luke 7:36–50). The account of Jesus dining at the house of Simon the Pharisee is recorded only in the Gospel of Luke. Yet, the emphasis of this pericope does not lie in Jesus' act of dining with the host, but rather in the arrival of a sinful woman who anointed Him (v. 38). This event naturally shocked the host (v. 39), since, from a Pharisaic perspective, it was considered defiling to associate with a sinful woman, let alone to permit oneself to be touched by her (v. 38). What is particularly noteworthy in this passage is the use of the expression "to sit down to eat." In other banquet narratives, Jesus appears as the honoured guest when dining with tax collectors and sinners. However, that is not the case here. In the Pharisee's house, Jesus is not treated as the principal guest but rather as one among other invitees, without any special recognition. This is underscored both by Jesus' own words in verses 44–46 and by the use of the term "to sit down to eat" in verse 36.

The verb employed here is *κατεκλίθη*, which literally means "to recline for the purpose of eating" (*to sit down to eat*), reflecting the dining posture customary in the Greco-Roman world.³⁰ Unlike the customary Greco-Roman practice of reclining at table, the verb employed here does not convey the posture of lying down to eat. Rather, it suggests a simple sitting for the meal. On this basis, it may be inferred that the Pharisee did not extend a genuine invitation to Jesus, but rather a formal one, perhaps even with the intention of testing Him rather than welcoming Him wholeheartedly. Verses 44–46

²⁹ Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary: Mark 8:27-16:20* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), S.359, Word Biblical Commentary 34B.

³⁰ Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, S.218.

clearly illustrate Simon the Pharisee's dismissive treatment toward Jesus, which underscores the lack of honor and respect typically afforded to an esteemed guest.

Simon did not act as a proper host. He neither provided water for Jesus to wash His feet nor offered Him a greeting. Yet Jesus was the invited guest who ought to have received due honor from the one who extended the invitation. In fact, there were three customary gestures expected of a host toward his guest. First, the host would place his hand upon the guest's shoulder and bestow a kiss of peace. Second, he would pour cool water over the guest's feet to cleanse them from the dust of the road. Third, the host would sprinkle a drop of fragrant oil, or burn incense, over the guest's head. Luke portrays, by contrast, how Jesus allowed a sinful woman to draw near to Him. In Jewish custom, it was considered improper for a woman to appear in public with her hair unbound. Yet this woman, deliberately letting down her hair, used it to wipe the feet of Jesus (v. 38).³¹ Jesus took the risk of losing His reputation in the midst of the Pharisees and other religious leaders by receiving this sinful woman. Yet it was precisely through this meal that Jesus revealed Himself as the friend of sinners, welcoming anyone who was willing to come to Him. The inner question of the Pharisee was, in a sense, correct: if Jesus were truly a prophet, He would know who this woman was. But Simon's conclusion was radically mistaken. His reasoning was, *"If Jesus is a prophet, then surely He knows who this woman is, and therefore He would certainly not receive her."* God's perspective, however, is entirely different. As A. Saphir insightfully remarks, *"Not merely though a sinner, but rather because she is a sinner, does Jesus accept her love."*³² Therefore, it is precisely because Jesus knew that the woman was a sinner that He received her.

Fifth, Jesus dined at the house of a Pharisee (Luke 11:37–44). In verse 37, it is narrated that Jesus was invited by a Pharisee to eat at his house, and He accepted the invitation and took His place at the meal. The term employed in the text is ἀνέπεσεν, which can be interpreted not only as 'to recline,' but also as 'to take one's place at the table.'³³ The issue raised in this particular meal is that Jesus did not wash His hands before eating. The act of handwashing prior to a meal was not practiced for reasons of hygiene, but rather as a symbolic act of purification from all that was considered unclean. *This washing was*

³¹ Pada saat pernikahannya, seorang gadis akan mengikat rambutnya dan tidak akan pernah muncul di muka umum dengan rambut terurai. Lihat William Barclay, *Lukas*, 134.

³² Adolph Saphir, *Jesus and the Sinner* (Charleston, South Carolina: BiblioBazaar, 2009), 116.

³³ Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, S.52.

done not for health reasons, but as a symbol of washing away any contamination from touching anything unclean. Not only did the Pharisees make a public show of their washing, but they also commanded everyone else to follow a practice originally intended only for the priest. The Pharisees loved to think of themselves as “clean” but their stinginess toward God and the poor proved that they were not as clean as they thought.³⁴ The Pharisees were astonished that Jesus did not wash His hands before eating (v. 38). According to ceremonial laws of dining, the hands had to be washed prior to the meal. A special vessel of water was usually provided by the host for this purpose. Barclay describes the ritual of hand-washing before a meal as follows: First, water was to be poured over the hands beginning from the little finger up to the wrist. Then the palms were to be cleansed by rubbing one hand against the other. Finally, water was poured over the hands once more, this time from the wrist down to the fingertips. Jesus responded to their astonishment by denouncing their practice (vv. 40–44). The reason for Jesus’ rebuke was that the Pharisees concentrated solely on external matters. Moreover, they placed excessive emphasis on minute details.³⁵ Boland asserts that Jesus’ failure to wash His hands does not imply that He intended to eat with dirty or unhygienic hands. Rather, it is possible that what Jesus did was to wash His hands without adhering to the ritualized procedure prescribed by religious laws and regulations concerning meals.³⁶

Sixth, Jesus Dines at the House of a Pharisaic Leader (Luke 14:1–6). In the Lukan narrative of shared meals, issues concerning Jesus and His conduct frequently emerge, often in connection with invitations extended by the Pharisees. Verse 1 records that Jesus went to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat there. Luke does not clarify whether Jesus came by invitation or otherwise. What is certain, however, is that Jesus entered that house on the Sabbath, and many people were carefully observing Him (v. 1). The Pharisaic leader did not appear to have arranged a formal banquet. The expression used is φαγεῖν ἄρτον, which literally means ‘to eat bread.’ In Jewish usage, however, the term ‘bread’ does not necessarily refer exclusively to bread, but can also signify a meal in general. In Hebrew thought, ‘to eat bread’ often connotes the act of eating together in fellowship.³⁷ Jesus was deliberately invited with the intent of finding fault in Him. In this

³⁴ *Life Application Study Bible NKJV*, 1855.

³⁵ William Barclay, *Lukas*, 226–227.

³⁶ B. J. Boland, *Injil Lukas*, 301.

³⁷ *Nelson’s Bible Encyclopedia for the Family* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982), 58.

particular context, the issue at stake was healing on the Sabbath. The Pharisees sought to entrap Jesus into declaring what was permissible and what was not permissible to do on the Sabbath. Yet, Jesus successfully overcame their attempt at entrapment.

2. Jesus Eating with the Multitudes (Matt. 14:13–21; 15:32–39; Mark 6:35–43; 8:1–10; Luke 9:10–17).

Jesus performed the miracle of feeding five thousand men with only five loaves and two fish. This act was not merely a demonstration of His divine power but also an expression of His compassion toward the crowds (Matt. 14:14; 15:32). When the disciples urged Him to dismiss the people, Jesus did not comply (Matt. 14:15). On the contrary, He instructed the disciples to take responsibility for feeding them (Matt. 14:16; 15:34). Mark 6:37 further records the disciples' objection to Jesus' command, highlighting their limited perspective (cf. Matt. 14:17–18). Mark 6:35–43 also describes the seating arrangement of the multitude, organized into groups of hundreds and fifties (v. 40). This structure parallels the way Moses organized Israel under appointed leaders in the wilderness. According to the *Word Biblical Commentary*, this communal meal reflects a new form of fellowship in Jesus' ministry, wherein the act of eating together becomes a symbolic expression of the kingdom of God and the eschatological banquet. *The symbolism of fellowship around the table reflecting a new kind of communion or community runs through Jesus' ministry. Here the arrangement in groups according to fifties and hundreds doubtless has more than a utilitarian function. In Exod 18:25 (Num 31:14) Moses arranged the Israelites in groups of 1000, 500, 100, and 10 under their respective leaders.*³⁸

This event constitutes a new form of communal meal in the context of the time. The seating of the crowd in organized groups conveys the image of a great banquet. Mark employs the term *συνπόσια*, which denotes a banquet in which people gather primarily to drink together, often indicating a festal occasion hosted by a group or association. By using this imagery, Mark portrays Jesus' act of feeding the five thousand as a grand banquet, received with joy and celebrated in communal fellowship.

Furthermore, the Gospel writers emphasize the satisfaction experienced by the multitude. Both Matthew 14:20 and 15:37 employ the verb *έχορτάσθησαν* ('they were satisfied'), signifying that the people were filled to the point of contentment. The use of the

³⁸ Robert A. Guelich, *Word Biblical Commentary: Mark 1-8:26* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), S.341, Word Biblical Commentary 34A.

passive voice is particularly significant, as it suggests that the crowd did not achieve satisfaction through their own effort, but rather were acted upon by another agent—namely, Jesus Himself as the divine provider. The aorist tense indicates that this action is understood as a completed event, highlighting the uniqueness of the miraculous feeding as a singular historical occurrence not to be repeated in the same manner. Thus, the narrative communicates both the eschatological overtones of a messianic banquet and the theological assertion that true satisfaction is granted solely through divine initiative.³⁹ Jesus and His disciples partook of the meal together with the multitude, an action unprecedented among Jewish rabbis. In Jewish custom, table fellowship was highly restricted and was typically reserved for those who shared ritual purity and social status; it was not to be extended indiscriminately. By contrast, in this miracle narrative, Jesus deliberately breaks such social and religious boundaries by eating together with the crowds. The miracle thus functions as more than an act of provision; it discloses Jesus' divine identity as the One who provides, exercises authority, and fulfills human needs in their entirety. Implicitly, the feeding of the multitude demonstrates that in Jesus, scarcity is transformed into abundance—what is minimal becomes maximized. This theological motif underscores the character of God revealed in Christ: He is both the sustainer of life and the inaugurator of a new communal reality in which all may share in God's provision without restriction.

3. Jesus Eating with His Disciples

On various occasions, Jesus deliberately taught only His disciples, particularly concerning His mission and the purpose of His coming into the world.

First, Jesus Eats the Passover with the Twelve Disciples (Matthew 26:20–29; Mark 14:12–25; Luke 22:14–23; John 13:21–30). On the Feast of Unleavened Bread, in preparation for celebrating the Passover as a commemoration of Israel's deliverance from slavery in Egypt, Jesus and His disciples shared a meal together (Matt. 26:20; Mark 14:12). According to the custom of the time, several foods were placed on a single plate, from which each person would take with his hand. The meal took place in the evening, and only Jesus and His disciples participated in it. Jesus nevertheless occupied the position of the host or the honored figure at the table. This is indicated by the use of the term *ἀνέκειτο*, which is

³⁹ Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, S.409.

equivalent to *ἀνακειμένον*. The very idea of betrayal by one who shared the same meal was regarded as a vile and barbaric act in that cultural context. It was during this shared meal with His disciples that Jesus announced that one among them would betray Him. Although Judas participated in the fellowship and intimacy of the table, this did not prevent him from becoming a betrayer. As Irwin observes, *"The kind of bondedness and presumed intimate relationship makes Judas's betrayal even more harsh and ironic."*⁴⁰ Due to the act of betrayal committed by Judas, the Last Supper became one of the most brutal and shameful scenes of treachery. Jesus used this opportunity of dining with His disciples to remind Judas and the others of the actions that Judas would soon take (Matt. 26:23; Mark 14:18; John 13:21). However, this did not lead to Judas' repentance (Matt. 6:25). The meal also served as a teaching moment for Jesus, instructing His disciples about the death He was about to endure (Matt. 26:24, 29, 28).

Second, Jesus dined at the house of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42). Luke notes the contrast between the two individuals who received Jesus into their home. One was busy serving Jesus (v. 40), while the other sat quietly, listening to Jesus' teaching (v. 39). Although this passage does not specifically describe Jesus' actions in terms of eating and drinking, from the portrayal provided by Luke, it is clear that Jesus used every visit as an opportunity for teaching. The visits and meals shared with Jesus were always occasions He used to instruct.

Theological Significance: Jesus Dining with Others

The food from Jesus represents something much greater. It introduces a new world, a new kingdom, and a new perspective. The food Jesus provided is not just symbolic, but also practical in its application. It brought social events, friendship, community, and acceptance. Several things can be observed based on the meals Jesus shared.

First, the act of sharing a meal is closely related to salvation. Tim Chester states, "Food is used to describe salvation and judgment (Luke 1:53; 6:21, 25), and people are described in terms of good food and bad food (Luke 3:17; 6:43-46; 12:1)." Food is used to symbolize both salvation and judgment, and people are depicted as either good food or bad food. Jesus' command to Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), that He wanted to stay at his house, provided Zacchaeus with an opportunity to receive God's salvation. Zacchaeus'

⁴⁰ Kevin W. Irwin, *Models of the Eucharist*, (New York: Paulist Press), 2005.178.

repentance and response led Jesus to declare, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham" (v. 9-10). Jesus' acceptance of the sinful woman who anointed Him allowed Jesus to declare, "Your sins are forgiven."

Second, food is closely related to the Giver of life. The importance of food for sustaining human life led Abraham Maslow to categorize it as one of the most basic human needs. However, food is not only for sustaining life; it also reminds humanity of God, who is the giver of life. The miracles that Jesus performed in feeding 5,000 and 4,000 people demonstrate His power to provide for their essential needs. These actions can be compared to God's provision of manna to the Israelites in the desert (Exod. 16). Jesus is the Lord who provides for all the needs of His people. He is the Good Host. By taking His place as the head of the table, He signifies that He is the God who provides food for His people, just as God did in the desert with the Israelites.

Third, sharing a meal teaches about the Kingdom of God. Hersberger states, "The theme of dining together is the closest symbol of the Kingdom of God."⁴¹ The same point is emphasized by Hope S. Antone, who states, "Through the story of the table in Luke 15:11-32, Jesus teaches about the Kingdom of God." She further explains, "If Jesus' table fellowship prior to the resurrection foreshadowed the Messianic banquet, and if His resurrection implies that the Messianic age has begun, then 'this scene is a foretaste or anticipation of the Messianic banquet with Jesus as host.'"⁴² Through the parable of the banquet, Jesus teaches His disciples about the Kingdom of God. The invitation is extended to those who are willing to respond. The phrase "many are invited, but few are chosen" reflects the attitude of the Pharisees who rejected the invitation, leading the invitation to be extended to those who were not part of the chosen people (non-Jews).

Fourth, sharing a meal signifies the establishment of friendship. Jesus, who was willing to dine with tax collectors and sinners, tore down the walls that had long separated people. Jesus came not to call the righteous, but to seek and save the lost, which made Him willing to sit with them. A great feast was held by a father because his lost son had returned. Everyone is welcomed because all are children of God. Blomberg writes, "Jesus clearly expected that, by eating with those who were excluded from the

⁴¹ Michele Hersberger, *Hospitalitas Orang Asing*, (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia) 2009.138.

⁴² Craig L. Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness*, 159.

community, he might be able to bring them into the community by way of faith and repentance.”⁴³

The Missiological Meaning: Jesus Dining Together

Every meal, especially when shared with others, carries a significant message regarding social patterns and hierarchies. Jesus welcomed individuals wherever they were, and whoever they were. With joy, He entered into their life stories, seeking to awaken a response of faith. Jesus drew near to the sick, the marginalized, and those who were rejected and ostracized from social circles. He was close to those labeled as sinners. Jesus' acceptance of the marginalized should remind us of God's role in the Old Testament, where God was deeply concerned for and defended the poor and the oppressed. Through Jesus, the power and love of God are revealed. Food and the tradition of sharing meals provide a way for us to understand cultural differences and help us to comprehend others. As stated, "The first step to being a good neighbor is to make an attempt to understand the beliefs and cultures of those who are different. Food and the traditions of eating and feasting give us a window into other cultures and help us understand them."⁴⁴ Chester even emphasizes that food should not only be an integral and significant part of human life, but it also embodies the meaning of mission; in fact, food itself manifests and enacts the mission. *Jesus is called "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners." This is why eating and drinking were so important in the mission of Jesus they were a sign of his friendship with tax collectors and sinners. His "excess" of food and "excess" of grace are linked. In the ministry of Jesus, meals were enacted grace, community, and mission.*⁴⁵

CONCLUSION

The act of dining together, as practiced by Jesus, was not without great purpose. Behind every visit and His presence at the communal meals, there lies a profound mission. Jesus aimed to fulfill His mission on earth, which was to seek and save the lost. What Jesus did was an expression of His love, acceptance, and hospitality towards sinful

⁴³ | *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Douglas E. Neel & Joel A. Pugh, 4.

⁴⁵ Tim Chester, *A Meal with Jesus*, 14.

humanity. Through sharing meals, Jesus broke through the Jewish cultural norms that rejected dining with tax collectors and sinners. He also condemned the Pharisees' focus on ritual alone. The communal meals that Jesus partook in held significant theological meaning, including themes of salvation, a reminder of the Giver of life, a depiction of the Kingdom of God, and the building of friendships. In terms of missiological meaning, it directly relates to God's mission for the world—to save the lost and the sinful.

Believers and the Church of God should make well-planned communal meals a priority, whether they take place at church, within various ministry groups, at homes, or in the community. These gatherings should serve as an opportunity to invite "new" people—those who have not yet encountered God—such as family members, coworkers, schoolmates, hobby friends, and neighbors. The goal is to invite them to share in the meal, foster friendships, and most importantly, bring them to church. Through these meals, the love of God can be proclaimed, and the Savior, Jesus Christ, can be introduced to them.

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