**GIVEN TO HOSPITALITY**

**A Christian’s Open-Door Policy**

Bethany was a small town not far from Jerusalem. In that village was a home composed of a brother and his two sisters. Lazarus, Mary and Martha were godly souls who had found a friend in a young preacher from Nazareth of Galilee. They had no doubt heard John the Baptist preach, and when he pointed to Jesus as the Messiah these three embraced and befriended Him. Living only a short walk from the Temple allowed the Lord to find refuge in a home that was welcoming, with those who would forever be remembered as His friends. He would be adored by Mary, being anointed by her sacrificial act of love (John 12:1-8). He would be fed by Martha, who had a heart of service and hospitality (Luke 10:38-41). He would come to weep at the death of His friend Lazarus (John 11:35). I would have loved to be a fly on the wall and hear the table talk after a day of ministry. That home was surely blessed by opening their doors and hearts to Jesus. Hospitality became a hallmark of Christianity from that day until now.

Bible readers know that the open-door policy of Aquila and Priscilla is legendary. Traveling preachers and entire congregations were often found within the walls of their home. We know Paul found love and support in these two souls of like-faith and like-occupation. When he came to the wicked city of Corinth and was afraid, he not only received encouragement from the Lord, but these dear friends as well (Ac. 18:9). Even though they had been banished from their home in Rome by Caesar they started fresh in this heathen city and soon made a big difference for the gospel’s sake (Acts 18:1-6). Their house was a haven for evangelists and brethren. Just read these words:

 *“Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. 5 Likewise greet the church that is in their house.”* - Romans 16:3-4

*“The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.”* - I Corinthians 16:19.

Paul’s affection can likely be traced back to those evenings when after a hard day of seeking and saving the lost he found comfort at Priscilla’s table. In their home he found peace. He never forgot their love, for he wrote of it often. God obviously didn’t forget either, using them to illustrate to all future generations the meaning of hospitality.

The Macedonian Call was issued in a vision to Paul. While the vision showed a man crying for help, the first converts were Lydia and her household (Acts 16:11-15). After her baptism she begged Paul and his band of evangelists to please stay in her home. Read these touching words: *“And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.’ So she persuaded us.”* – Acts 16:15

God was making sure to point out Lydia’s hospitality to all succeeding generations. She had played a big role in Europe’s salvation! I have loved the name Lydia ever since I first read this story.

Dorcas, also called Tabitha, had a heart for hospitality. When she suddenly died it brought a dark cloud of grief over the church in Joppa. A fast messenger rushed to Peter in the nearby town of Lydda to implore him to come quickly. He hurried to where she was laid in state for mourning. As was typical of funerals everyone spoke of all the good the deceased had done while alive. In her case she had built a sterling reputation. “*This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds*” (Ac. 9:36). Included in those works and deeds was the making of tunics and garments for “*all the widows*” (Ac. 9:39). Dorcas couldn’t preach, but she could show Joppa what a Christian woman can do.

Peter, Andrew, James, John and all the other apostles were commissioned to preach to the Jewish world, then to the whole world (Matthew 10:5-15; 28:18-20). They were to depend on the generosity of the people to meet their needs. A blessing of “*peace*” was to be given to those families that cared for them: *“Now whatever city or town you enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and stay there till you go out. And when you go into a household, greet it. If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it”* (Matt. 10:13). Imagine hosting two of the apostles for a few days or weeks as they helped change the world. God’s peace would surely fall upon you.

The qualifications for mature Christians who are seen by the church as spiritually strong enough to become elders (and elder’s wives) includes the open-door policy of hospitality. Paul told the church to look for these kinds of men and women:

“*A bishop then must be …* ***hospitable***” (I Tim. 3:2).

*“For a bishop must be* ***hospitable****, a lover of what is good” (Tit. 1:8).*

Peter, himself an elder, and one who had many times enjoyed the room and board from disciples throughout the world, explained the Christian’s mindset this way:

*“Be* ***hospitable*** *to one another without grumbling. As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (I Pet. 4:8).*

What about you and your home? Do you have memories of keeping the preacher, or opening your hearth and heart to those in need? When Jesus said, “*It is more blessed to give than to receive*” (Acts 20:35) He was not referring to just money, but to our time, talents and our open-door policy to spend-and-be-spent for the Lord’s glory. We do that every time we bring others into our home to share the love of God with a meal and a word of encouragement.

What Lazarus, Mary, Martha, Aquila, Priscilla, Dorcas and Lydia experienced was remembered by God. He will remember you too when you “*do it to one of the least of these*” (Matt. 25:37-40).

“*Be given* (addicted) *to hospitality*” – Rick