

Jesus Friend of Sinners – Introduction

1/27/19 – Pastor Randy

I am asking the Holy Spirit to take these messages over the next several weeks as we move towards Good Friday and Easter, and deepen our understanding of, and appreciation for, God's love for us. A love expressed most vividly and clearly in the manner in which Jesus interacted with the "sinners" he came to save. We are going to listen to, and watch Jesus!

The primary concern of the Christian is to know God. Trusting in God, loving God, and serving God are all secondary concerns, as vital as they may be. The more I know Him; the more I trust Him; the deeper I love Him; the better equipped I am to serve Him.

Luke 5:27-32

After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, "Follow me." And leaving everything, he rose and followed him. And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

Luke 7:31-35

"To what then shall I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, "'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep.' For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by all her children."

In Luke 7:31-35 Jesus uses a vivid illustration to communicate that the religious leaders, who rejected both John the Baptist and Jesus as ministers sent from God, were acting like immature children. Their excuse for rejecting John's prophetic message of warning was because John was too other-worldly and impersonal. Their excuse for rejecting Jesus' pastoral approach

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was that he was too friendly and too personable with “sinners”. The religious leaders criticized John the Baptist and Jesus because neither would “play the game” the way they wanted. They wanted to control the rules of Judaism, but John and Jesus came to call people back to playing the “game of life” according to God’s rules; the way it was supposed to be played.

In this passage we have the one explicit statement in the gospels where Jesus is referred to as a friend of sinners. This phrase is found on the lips of Jesus but it originated as an accusation against Jesus by the religious leaders. They accused John the Baptist of being demonized and Jesus of impious, ungodly behavior because he socialized with sinful people. Neither accusation was true. The irony however, is that when they labeled Jesus a “friend of sinners” they were speaking truth. They meant it as an accusation but it was actually a commendation, affirming that Jesus was and really is a friend of sinners. He is a sinner’s best friend because he is the sinner’s savior!

In the first passage we read from Luke 5, we have the record of one specific incident where Jesus befriended a sinner, a tax collector named Matthew, who later was chosen to be one of Jesus 12 closest disciples. Luke refers to Matthew by his Hebrew name Levi. He tells us that Jesus called Matthew to follow him. Matt left everything and followed. Sometime shortly after Matt began to follow Jesus he planned a big dinner party at his house and he invited a bunch of his tax-collector friends. The religious leaders saw Jesus disciples going to Matt’s house and they asked them why Jesus would go eat at the home with “tax collectors and sinners”. Jesus overheard their complaint and responded by saying, “A physician doesn’t spend his days treating healthy people but sick people. I didn’t come to call righteous people but sinners to repentance.”

Who are the sinners?!?

Note that in both passages it was the religious leaders who labeled certain people as sinners. They affixed this label to those Jews who lived as blatant violators of the Jewish law. Those who did not faithfully follow Torah. Not surprisingly, they did not consider themselves a part of this group. They were

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scrupulous followers of the Torah. Therefore, they were not sinners...or so they thought.

Myth #1 – There are two categories of people: The righteous and the sinners.

TRUTH: All have sinned and have fallen short of the Glory of God. There is none righteous, not even one.

So why did Jesus describe Himself as a “spiritual doctor” who came only for “sick sinners” and not for those who were “healthy righteous” people?

Jesus was making the point that he had come for those who recognized they were sick sinners. He can’t help those who won’t acknowledge they are sick.

Jesus clearly was not teaching that the religious leaders were free from sin.

He called them liars and children of the Devil. In Matt. 23 Jesus confronted them for being not just sinners, but hypocrites, who pretended to be sinless.

He said, “You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?”

Myth #2 – Jesus only reached out to, and only cared for, the irreligious or non-religious folk. Jesus despises religious people.

TRUTH: Since all are sinners and Jesus came for sinners, Jesus came for all.

In the next few weeks we’ll see examples of Jesus reaching out to Pharisees.

Myth #3 – Correcting sinners is condemning sinners.

TRUTH: Being a friend to sinners requires one to confront sinners and correct sinners, in a non-condemning manner. A true friend confronts but doesn’t condemn.

Proverbs 27:6 says, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy. A friend is faithful enough to tell you the painful truth.

The one who strokes your ego along the path of destruction is your enemy.

Our passage began with Jesus calling Matthew, who later became one of the 12 disciples, to follow him. It ends with Jesus explaining that His mission was to call sinners to repentance.

The call to be a disciple, the call to follow Jesus, is a call that is made to sinners, calling them to come to repentance.

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DO you want a clear, concise and compelling explanation of the meaning of repentance? Here it is: “Follow Jesus!” We hear the word “repent” and we think “Stop it!” “Stop cheating, stop lying, stop sleeping around, stop being abusive, stop getting drunk and high”. “Stop it, stop it, stop it!!!”

That is not biblical repentance. Biblical repentance is the call to stop sin and follow Jesus. Better yet, it is the call to stop sin by following Jesus! If you follow Jesus, you will stop all of the above, but you can stop all of the above and not be following Jesus!!

How did Jesus call sinners to repentance?

How Did Jesus “Reach” Sinners to Repentance? That is a great question with important implications for how we fulfill our mission to do the same. Jesus ate with them. He spent time with them. He was willing to enter their world, establishing their value as persons without approving of their sin. The Pharisees viewed sinners as “defiled people”. Their approach was “repentance first, then presence. Once you repent, then we can talk. **Jesus viewed “presence and friendship as the path to repentance.”**

Jesus shows us a model that prioritizes relationships above rules. There is a popular saying used by those of us who counsel parents. “Rules without relationship leads to rebellion.” Jesus demonstrated that rules in the context of relationship leads to repentance. This does not mean that rules within the context of relationship always leads to repentance. Its just more effective.

Jesus did not shy away from confronting and correcting sin but he did it from a position of *sitting down with broken sinners* rather than *talking down to broken sinners*.

It is a call that is made in the context of friendship. Jesus called the disciples to be his friends. Jesus is both our Lord AND our friend.

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the

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servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you."

When Jesus told his disciples that he was their friend, he wasn't denying that he was also their Lord. He wasn't denying his place of authority over their lives. He said, "You are my friends...if you do what I command."

Jesus can be BOTH our King, our Lord, standing in a place of authority over our lives...and still be our friend. Jesus said, I don't' call you servants because the servant is not in an intimate relationship with His Lord. He just does what he is told. Jesus told his disciples, you are my friends because you are partners with me in performing my Father's will. As friends Jesus revealed more than just His commands; He revealed his heart, His desires, His purpose behind the command. Jesus calls His disciples "friends" because they serve Him while sharing with Him an intimate relationship whereby both the Father's heart and mission are made known to them. It is the difference between performing a service FOR our Lord and performing a service with our Lord!

Jesus was a friend of sinners, a friend to His disciples who were sinners and needed his saving friendship.

In an ideal world Jesus would have come and recruited his disciples from among the religious leaders, the Pharisees and Sadducees. But they weren't interested in being taught to follow. They weren't willing to admit their need of a Savior. Jesus called several fishermen, a tax-collector, a zealot or two and some whose occupation was unknown. He called sinners to be a part of His mission to reclaim other sinners; those who had come under the power and dominion of sin, living lives that were unfaithful to the covenant.

What did he do when he called them? He called them "so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons." (Mark 3:14,15) He spent time with sinners to bring them to repentance and to teach them to spend time with other sinners so they could come to repentance as well.

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CLOSE: I had two conversations with members of our church recently who expressed feelings of spiritual inadequacy. One person was feeling like they didn't meet the demands of discipleship and were not worthy of being considered a disciple. The other expressed a lack of feeling qualified to serve in a leadership capacity. So I want to share with you a few examples from the lives of Jesus' disciples to remind you that Jesus calls his followers friends despite our weaknesses and sin.

For those of you who have been struggling with doubts. Jesus is a friend that you can trust and express your doubts to. He didn't condemn Thomas when Thomas doubted Him. Jesus didn't scold Thomas for his skepticism. Should Thomas have been satisfied with seeing Jesus? Of course! Could Jesus have refused to let Thomas set the conditions under which he would believe? Shouldn't Jesus have been put off by Thomas' whiny demands: *"I won't believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side."* "I won't...unless, unless, unless". How did Jesus respond? He came to Thomas. He invited Thomas to see and touch. He helped him with His doubt...just like we would expect from a good friend!

James and John were called "Sons of Thunder". Luke records an incident where Jesus and the disciples were rejected by inhospitable Samaritans. John and James asked Jesus for permission to call fire down upon them! They had a little bit of a temper problem. A little bit of bitterness. Jesus stuck with these quick tempered disciples and John turns into the NT author who writes the most about the importance of love and compassion!!

All the disciples had issues with bitter jealousy, rivalry and pride. But Jesus patiently loved them as their Lord and their friend and molded them into a unified team.

Jesus is the best friend a sinner like me could ever have. He is the best friend a sinner like you could ever have. He calls sinners to follow him and to join him in His mission to reclaim sinners for the Kingdom by befriending them in the world.

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