

2. Jesus Is a Friend of Sinners

In our last topic, we talked about what the world is and saw that we are to avoid the sinful world system and its lusts. However, that does not mean that we are to avoid sinners and separate ourselves from them. Instead, we are to help developing leaders learn to understand that Jesus is a friend of sinners, and that if they are going to follow the example of Jesus, it also means that they will become a friend of sinners. That will be the focus of our topic today.

In Luke 19:10, Christ said, “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” In Matthew 9:13b, Christ told the Pharisees, “...For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.” Of course, the attitude of the Pharisees is shown in Luke 15:1-2, where we read: “Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, ‘This Man receives sinners and eats with them.’” Unfortunately, today, many Christians act like the Pharisees, instead of following the example Christ.

Luke 19:10, mentioned in the previous paragraph, shows us that the focus of the life of Christ was not to avoid the lost, but rather to seek and to save the lost. Christ was continually seeking those who thought they were too sinful for Jesus to forgive them. Early in His ministry, Christ was seeking the Samaritan woman at the well, when He said, in John 4:7, “Give Me a drink.” According to John 4:17-18, the woman was a Samaritan woman with a bad background. “The woman answered and said, ‘I have no husband.’ Jesus said to her, ‘You have well said, “I have no husband,” for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly.’”

In fact, Christ’s own disciples were surprised that Christ talked with the woman. John 4:27 says, “And at this *point* His disciples came, and they marveled that He talked with a woman; yet no one said, ‘What do You seek?’ or, ‘Why are You talking with her?’ Later, in John 4:35, Christ told the disciples, “Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and *then* comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!” Over the next three years, the disciples came to realize that Jesus is a friend to sinners, and that became a part of their lives and ministries as well.

In Matthew 13:45-46, Christ taught the parable about the merchant seeking beautiful pearls. Those verses say, “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.” Here, we see that the merchant was diligently seeking beautiful pearls and was willing to pay the price to purchase the pearl of great price. Ephesians 5:25 tells us that Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. Romans 5:8 tells us that Christ did this while we were still sinners. Truly Jesus is a friend of sinners.

In Luke 15:8-10, we see that the woman sought diligently until she found the coin that was lost. In the prior parable, in Luke 15:3-7, we see that the shepherd diligently sought the sheep that was lost until he found it. These two parables were spoken immediately after Luke 15:1-2 tells us,

“Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, ‘This Man receives sinners and eats with them.’” We have already mentioned that some Christians seem to be more like the Pharisees than they are like Christ.

However, we learn a second very important lesson from the fact that Jesus responded to this attitude by giving the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and later, the lost sons. In each of those parables, we see that the main character represents Christ who is seeking the lost. These parables had to be a great encouragement to the tax collectors and sinners who drew near to hear Christ, because, the parables told them that instead of Christ rejecting them, He was actively searching for them.

In addition to actively seeking those who were sinners, Jesus invited a tax collector that was closely associated with the sinners to follow Him. Luke 5:27-29 says, “After these things He went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, ‘Follow Me.’ So he left all, rose up, and followed Him. Then Levi gave Him a great feast in his own house. And there were a great number of tax collectors and others who sat down with them.” The tax collectors and sinners were both groups that were considered undesirable by the Jews, especially by the Jewish religious leaders. However, Christ invited Levi (Matthew) to follow Him, and later, chose Matthew to be one of the twelve – Matthew 10:3. The tax collectors and sinners knew that Christ was their friend when He chose one of them to be a part of the twelve.

These verses show a second way that Jesus showed He is a friend of sinners. Christ chose to accept an invitation to a great feast in the home of Matthew, even though He knew that most of those invited were either tax collectors or sinners. This is just one of many times that Christ visited the homes of those who were rejected, by the rest of the people, because of their sin. Luke 19:6-7 tells what happened when Christ invited Himself to the home of Zacchaeus. Those verses tell us, “So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully. But when they saw *it*, they all complained, saying, ‘He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner.’”

In both of the passages mentioned above, we see that Jesus spent time eating with sinners. These tax collectors and sinners knew that Jesus was their friend, because He took time to eat with them. Many Christians would have to go back a long time to remember the last time they sat down and ate with those who are rejected, by their culture, because of their sin. Christ knew that, in the context of eating together, He would have the opportunity to invite these people to repent. Luke 5:32 says, “I have not come to call *the* righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”

Christ also showed that He is a friend of sinners by healing a man who had been paralyzed for thirty-eight years. The statement that Christ made to the man would suggest that He was probably paralyzed as a direct result of his sin. John 5:14 says, “Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, ‘See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.’” For a man to be paralyzed for that long, as a direct result of sin, would give a man a long time to think about the wrong choices he had made. However, Christ chose to show this particular man that He was his friend.

Christ took the time to show that He is a friend to those who have been totally humiliated by others, because of their sin. In John 8:1-11, the religious leaders brought a woman to Jesus as He was teaching in the temple. They said that they had caught this woman in the very act of adultery and asked if she should be stoned. Instead, Christ just wrote on the ground until everyone left, because they had been convicted by their own consciences. That we read, in John 8:10-11. “When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, ‘Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?’ She said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said to her, “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.”” Instead of condemning the woman, Christ forgave her and gave her a new future.

Christ took two more opportunities to show that He is a friend to sinners as He hung on the cross. In Luke 23:34, we read, “Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.’ And they divided His garments and cast lots.” He said this even as the rulers and the soldiers that stood around the cross sneered at Him and mocked Him.

Then, Christ reached out in love to one of the thieves who was hanging on the cross beside Him. Luke 23:39-43 tells us, “Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, ‘If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.’ But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.’ Then he said to Jesus, ‘Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.’” Truly this thief knew that Jesus was his friend in his hour of greatest need.

Christ wants every developing leader to follow His example and become a friend to sinners, so they can share with those sinners how to be set free from the bondage of sin. Christ gives each of us the privilege of showing developing leaders how to be a friend of sinners, by our example. May the Lord richly bless you as you provide an example, of the importance of being a friend to sinners, to developing leaders.