

Who Would Jesus Have Dinner With?

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Date: 21 March 2021

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[0 : 00] Well, would you turn with me, please, to the words that we read there in Matthew's Gospel in chapter 9. Matthew's Gospel in chapter 9, and reading verse 13.

Where Jesus says, I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.

Well, I want to focus for a few moments with you at these verses, Matthew chapter 9, verses 9 through to 13. And the theme of this short passage is, who would Jesus have dinner with?

Who would Jesus have dinner with? And we're going to look at it really under two headings. I'm someone who loves alliteration, so my apologies if you don't like alliteration.

But we're going to look at the passage under the headings, the call, and then the company. The call, and then the company. First, we have the call. That's in verse 9.

[1 : 07] And here, Matthew focuses on the call that Jesus gives. The call that Jesus gives. Now, before going any further, let's consider the context. Jesus has commenced his public ministry.

He's been baptized in the River Jordan. He's been tempted in the wilderness. He's called his first disciples. And he's delivered his sermon on the mound. But Jesus has also begun to demonstrate his divine authority.

He has shown his authority over storms, his authority over sickness, his authority over satanic opposition. And in the immediate verses preceding this, he has shown his authority to forgive sin. He has gone to his hometown. He has gone to the village of Capernaum. And while there, he has met a man who was paralyzed and told this man that his sins were forgiven.

And he had shown his authority to forgive this man's sins by healing him from his paralysis. It was both an inward and an outward healing. And now we read about Jesus' encounter with a man named Matthew, who is the author of this book.

[2 : 13] The setting is given at the beginning of verse 9. We're told where Jesus was. We read that he passed on from there. He's now leaving Capernaum, and he's continuing with his itinerant ministry.

Mark tells us that he was walking by the sea. And while he's walking along, we're told who Jesus met. We read that he saw a man called Matthew. Both Mark and Luke note that this man also went by the name of Levi, and that he was the son of a man called Alphaeus.

And we read that Matthew was sitting at his tax booth. He's a tax collector. Now, in the ancient world, tax collecting was full of corruption. The Jews were being taxed by the oppressive Roman regime, and the Romans would often get other Jews to tax their fellow countrymen.

The way that these Jewish tax collectors earned a living, the way that they made their income was by adding to the tax levy and then keeping that for themselves. As such, they were seen as traitors and turncoats.

And that is how this man, Matthew, would have been viewed by his contemporaries. That is how he would have been viewed by his community. He would be seen as someone not to be trusted, a devious fellow.

[3 : 26] And in the second half of verse 9, we hear Jesus' call, and we see Matthew's response. We can begin by noting the call of Jesus. Matthew's sitting at his tax booth.

He doesn't appear to have any interest in Jesus. No doubt he would have heard about him. Jesus' fame as a wandering preacher and performer of miracles was generating a lot of local publicity. Wherever people went locally, they would be hearing about this man, Jesus. But when Jesus draws near, Matthew remains at his desk.

Nothing and no one is going to come between Matthew and his work. Matthew operates by the principle, time is money. And so nothing is going to distract him from his work, not even the arrival

of Jesus.

And it's at that moment that Jesus calls, follow me. It is the same call that Peter and Andrew received back in Matthew chapter 4. It is the call to discipleship.

[4 : 26] It is the call to follow Jesus. The call to have your whole life and worldview shaped and identified by Jesus. And we see Matthew's response to that call.

We read, and he rose and followed him. He puts down his ledger, puts aside the coins, gets up from his chair, closes the office door, and he immediately follows after Jesus.

There's no wavering. There's no hesitation. There is no deliberation. He simply gets up and obeys. And, you know, it's interesting to consider what Matthew is willing to give up in response to Jesus' call.

Peter and James and John and Andrew could always go back to fishing. If things didn't work out when it came to following Jesus, they could always go back to their old business.

They had that safety net, no pun intended. But Matthew's got absolutely nothing to fall back on. The Romans would immediately replace him with someone else.

[5 : 26] Tax collecting may have been an unpopular occupation, but it was also a financially secure occupation. And what self-respecting Jew would ever employ a former tax collector like Matthew?

Matthew is effectively giving up everything to follow Jesus. And what's even more interesting is that he's either too modest or simply not interested in recording this.

In his gospel, Luke notes the fact that Matthew left everything to follow Jesus. But Matthew simply notes that he rose and followed Jesus.

There's no mention of what he left behind, only who he went after. Like that great missionary Jim Elliot, Matthew can say he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. His whole focus is on the one who is infinitely valuable. His whole focus is on this Jesus. And so he simply records the fact that he got up and followed him.

[6 : 31] Now friends, as we consider this verse, we can see the sovereign and effective call of Jesus. Jesus calls Matthew with the words, follow me, and Matthew immediately obeys.

It's what theologians call effectual calling. It's the idea that in conversion, the Lord calls a person from a state of spiritual darkness to spiritual light.

The idea that in conversion, the Lord calls a person from spiritual deadness to spiritual life. It's the idea that in conversion, the Lord enlightens a person's mind, removes their heart of stone, gives them a heart of flesh, renews their wills and draws them to himself.

It is the sovereign, creative, unstoppable voice of God invading a person's life. It is a miracle. It is a miracle. It is a miracle. It is a miracle of grace, which the American theologian Jonathan Edwards called a greater miracle than the creation of the cosmos.

Just think about that for a moment. If you're listening today and you're a Christian, let that thought sink in. The sovereign Lord has powerfully spoken into your life and he has called you, he has drawn you to himself.

[7 : 48] Or he may have used a preacher in doing so. He may have used a Sunday school teacher in doing so. He may have used your husband or wife in doing so. He may have used your parents in doing so.

He may have used a particular circumstance or providence in doing so. But ultimately, it is his work and it's wondrous in our eyes. He has brought you from darkness to light, from deadness to life.

Let me ask, when did you last thank and credit the Lord for choosing you and approaching you and powerfully calling you to himself?

And that sovereign and effective call is what gives us hope and comfort in our evangelistic efforts and our witnessing. It reminds us that no one is too far gone.

No one is too hard. No one is too indifferent to ever come to Jesus. If they're being converted depended solely on us, then we would have cause to despair. We would despair over every missed opportunity.

[8 : 54] We would despair over every faltering conversation. We would despair over every poorly preached sermon that they had to hear or that we ourselves delivered. But we take comfort from knowing that there is a sovereign Lord who can powerfully draw people, call people to himself through his word and by his spirit.

And we simply look to him and wait on him and depend on him and pray to him. We pray that he would call people and draw people to himself through our frail, fallible, feeble efforts.

Friends, let's not underestimate the power, the efficacy of sovereign grace. Let's not underestimate the power of God's sovereign call.

If you call people like me and if you call people like you, then he can call others who are indifferent, others who are cold, others who, like Matthew, are so absorbed in their work that they wouldn't even look up at first when Jesus came near to them.

So that's the call. But we come second to the company. Look at verses 10 to 13. And here Matthew focuses on the company that Jesus kept.

[10:11] In verse 10, we're given a new setting. We're told where Jesus goes at the beginning of verse 10. Mark tells us that they went to Levi's house. Luke tells us that Levi threw him a great feast.

But here Matthew simply says that they went to the house. He's too humble to say that it's his house that they went to. He's too modest to speak about the great feast that he paid for, that he prepared, that he provided.

He will not say anything about what he did for the Lord. He is only going to speak about what the Lord did for the likes of him. And we're also told that Jesus was reclining at table in the house. He was having dinner with those present. He's enjoying a meal with them. Now, it's important to remember that to share a meal in that culture was to share life together.

It's a scene of fellowship. It's a scene of intimacy. It's a scene of enjoyment of one another's company. This is far closer than simply teaching or preaching at a distance.

[11:13] This is the Jesus who doesn't simply deliver a sermon on the mount. The Jesus who doesn't simply preach from a boat. But the Jesus who has dinner with men and women.

The Jesus who loves to sup with his people. And we're told who was present at the meal. We read that many tax collectors were there. Matthew's colleagues have all come to the feast.

These men were barred from the religious life of the community. They couldn't enter the synagogue. They couldn't enter the temple. And they were barred from the social life of the community.

They couldn't give testimony in a court of law. They had a distributable profession. And were regarded with contempt and with disgust. We're also told that sinners were there.

Here are people who have violated and rebelled against God's laws. People who have violated God's commands. Here are people who have lived dubious lives. People who have lived devious lives.

[12:14] People who have lived duplicitous lives. Here are people whom the community had written off. But they'd not simply written them off. They were also gossiping about them. And speaking about them in hushed tones.

Criticizing their scandalous behavior. So this is a meal for tax collectors and sinners. A meal for the very outcasts of society.

And in verse 11 we hear the complaint. We're introduced to the Pharisees at the beginning of verse 11. These were the social and the religious conservatives of Jesus' day.

They taught a doctrine of salvation by separation. They fully believed that in order to receive the blessing of God. In order to receive the favor of God.

You had to avoid contact with anything that might be deemed unclean. And they went to great lengths to maintain their purity. They added to God's laws just to make sure that there was no way that they could get their hands dirty morally or even physically.

[13:17] And now they come with a complaint to Jesus' disciples. Look again at verse 11. They see Jesus having dinner with these tax collectors and sinners. Reclining at table with these men and women.

He's sitting with those whom they regarded as the very dregs of society. And they come to the disciples saying, Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?

They're attempting to get the disciples to doubt the credibility of Jesus. Doubt his credibility as their teacher. Doubt his credibility as their leader. Doubt his credibility as their friend.

As they question his actions and his character. They're saying to the disciples, Shame on you for being associated with such a man. What an embarrassment he is. He's doing what's not right socially or religiously.

Can you possibly keep following him? And in verses 12 and 13, we hear Jesus' response to the Pharisees' complaint. Jesus begins by telling them that it's the sick who need a doctor, not the

healthy.

[14 : 24] Look at verse 12. Matthew's already presented Jesus as the one who was willing to cure physical maladies, such as fevers, such as leprosy, such as paralysis.

But there is also a spiritual malady that Jesus has come to deal with. The disease of sin. As far as Jesus is concerned, he must go to those who have been infected with this dreadful, deadly disease. He can't hold back from them. He cannot recoil from them. He must go to them. These are the people who need him. And Jesus carries on by drawing the Pharisees back to the Old Testament. Look at verse 13. He takes him to Old Testament prophecy. He takes him to the prophet Hosea. And the words in Hosea chapter 6, I desire mercy, not sacrifice.

The people in Hosea's day appeared to be very religious. As they went to the temple with their extravagant offerings. But they were lacking in mercy. They were lacking in steadfast love toward one another.

[15 : 28] And that lack of mercy displayed hearts that were in reality far from God. They had failed to understand that mercy lies at the heart of true religion. And now Jesus says to them, go and learn what this means.

He's challenging the religious experts to go home, to read their Bibles, and to take on board what their Bibles are saying. He's essentially accusing them of displaying the same behavior as unbelieving, faithless Israel in Hosea's day.

He's saying to them, you can be as religious as you like. But if you're lacking in mercy toward others, you've missed the whole point of what God really wants.

And finally, Jesus makes a statement about his ministry. Look again at verse 13. We read, for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.

In Matthew chapter 1, Joseph is told that Mary is going to give birth to a son and he is to name the child Jesus. Why? Because he will save his people from their sins.

[16 : 34] And now here Jesus says that his whole purpose for coming into the world is to call sinners. He's not come for those who are self-satisfied. Those who think that they've got it sorted.

Those who think that their lives are all together. Those who see themselves as righteous. No, he's not come for them. He's come rather for those who are desperate. Those who know that they have a sin problem and they need a saviour and his salvation.

These are the kind of people Jesus has come for. Well, friends, in these verses we're being reminded of that great gospel truth that Jesus is the friend of sinners.

Here's Jesus, the Lord of the universe. And he's eating with those whom the Pharisees saw as being detestable, unclean, the scum of the community.

Here's Jesus, the long promised Messiah. And he's sharing life. He's having fellowship with those who could never enter a synagogue. Those who could never enter a temple.

[17 : 39] Those who were cut off from the religious life of Judaism. Here's the saviour who draws near to and even reclines with those who feel that they could never approach him.

Here's the saviour who reaches down to those who are in the fearful pit and in the mighty clay.

Here's the saviour who came into the world not to congratulate smug and self-satisfied Pharisees, but rather to call wearied and heavily laden sinners.

Yes, he was a great teacher. Yes, he was a great miracle worker. Yes, he was a great example. But he was and he is the saviour.

The friend of sinners. The friend of those who are desperate and who desperately need forgiveness. And you know, friends, that is such good news for us today.

In fact, it is the best news that any of us could possibly hear today. Even if we were told that there was no more coronavirus and we were told that any complications from Brexit were at an end and that the world was all sorted.

[18 : 49] No, friends. The best news that we could hear above all these other things is that Jesus has come for sinners. He is the friend of sinners.

He is the saviour of sinners. There is no sin so deep, so dark, so disgusting, so despicable that it puts us beyond the reach of grace.

That is what this passage tells us.

In a sermon on these verses, Ligon Duncan said the following. There may be some of you today saying, well, that's all fine for these respectable, well-dressed, clean-shaven folks around here.

But I've had a child out of wedlock and I'm looked down upon by all who know that I've had that happen to me. They know what I've done. I'm beyond the reach of this love. I'm beyond the reach of forgiveness.

[19 : 48] And here is Christ saying, I came for sinners. Or you say, but you don't understand. I've committed adultery. I've been unfaithful to my wife. I've been unfaithful to my husband.

And surely I'm beyond the reach of this particular love. And here is Christ saying, I came for sinners. And you can rack up all the socially disrespected and unrespectable sins that you want. And the Lord Jesus Christ is going to come back and he is going to say, I came for sinners. Anyone who has a sense of their need, anyone who has a sense of their sin, anyone who has a sense that they need forgiveness, the Lord Jesus Christ is saying, I came for you.

Jesus came for sinners. What a message. Maybe there's someone who's listening today and you just need to hear this. There is no sin so deep, so dark, so disgusting, so despicable that it puts you beyond the reach of grace.

The only sin that can never be forgiven is the sin of unbelief. The sin of deliberately and defiantly refusing to cling to Jesus by faith.

[21 : 01] So friend, why not run into the arms of Jesus? Whether you would have called yourself a Christian today or not, why not run into the arms of Jesus?

He already knows the worst about you. He already knows the worst about me. And he says, I came not to call the righteous. I came to call sinners.

But you know, these verses also give us a great example. They give us a great challenge when we look at Jesus. C.T. Studd famously said, Some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell.

I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell. And that's what we see in Jesus. He had a heart for sinners and he went out to them. He reached out to them.

He went to those who were broken with guilt. He went to those with a past and a background. He went to those with baggage. He went to those whom everyone spoke about in hushed tones and prayed would never come to their church services.

[22 : 10] He went to those whom the religious leaders pointed the finger at. And he held out his arms in welcome to them. They knew that he would happily recline at table with them.

And friends, if we have the heart of Christ, we'll be the same. We'll be the same. In his commentary on Matthew, R.C. Sproul tells the following story.

Many years ago, I talked to a young Episcopalian priest who was serving a parish in Clareton, Pennsylvania, where I went to high school. Clareton was a mill town. And at that time, the mills were suffering from tremendous levels of unemployment.

The priest asked me, how can I grow my church? He explained that he was pastoring a mission church with only 25 members. I told him that it takes time to build a church, especially when it starts out with just a handful of people.

So he would need to be patient. I went on to tell him, it's not going to help you in this environment to just put a sign in front of your church. If you want to have a ministry in this town, you're going to have to go where the pain is.

[23 : 19] If I were starting a church in Clareton, I would spend time every day of the week in the union hall and the bars, because that is where the pain is found in this town. If you want to build a church in Clareton, you have to be willing to get your hands dirty.

He gulped when I told him that. Well, friends, are we willing to get our hands dirty as we reach out to men and women who desperately need to hear and see and experience the felt love of Christ? Will this church, this church in Aberdeen, be a harbour for storm-tossed saints, Christians who just feel that they've got it wrong, Christians who are wearied, Christians who have backslidden, Christians who feel that everything's out to get them?

Will this church be a harbour? Will it be a haven for storm-tossed saints? And will it be a church for bruised and broken sinners?

Men and women whom the rest of the world may have written off. Men and women whom everyone else would gossip about. Men and women who have a past and a background.

[24 : 49] Men and women who are desperately longing for a fresh start. Friends, will this be a place where grace is declared?

And I know it's been declared for many years in the ministries of David McPherson and Ivor Martin and Alec MacDonald and Hector Cameron.
And I know it's been declared. Friends, will it also be a place where grace isn't simply declared from a pulpit, but where it's also displayed and demonstrated in the pews and the chairs.
People wandering in. People wandering in. Find Christians ministering to them. As their master, their lord, their saviour, their example, Jesus.
Has ministered to them.