

JESUS CHRIST

CLASS SIX – FRIEND OF SINNERS

Introduction

Welcome to Class 7 of our series Who is Jesus Christ. Today's topic is Jesus – the Friend of Sinners. [PLAY SCENE 39 REVERSED TO JESUS APPROACHING HOUSE] This scene mixes together two different events from Jesus life (Luke 5 and Luke 15) but both of the passages have a similar message. We will look at each of the passages. Turn first to Luke 5. The scene shows two groups of people – (1) the good Jews at the door who refuse to go into Matthew's house [Peter joined this group last from the boats] and (2) the unsavory types inside Matthew's house. Let's talk first about the group inside the house.

Inside Matthew's House

Luke 5:27-31. What kind of people was Jesus reaching out to here? Tax collectors – hated collaborators with Rome with a reputation for being corrupt and oppressive. “sinners” – people who didn't follow the Law – worldly people, drunkards, prostitutes. Very unsavory types. In the movie the “good” Jews like James and the other disciples didn't even want to go inside the house of the tax collector. They tried to stop Jesus from doing it.

Did Jesus call those inside the house to repentance? Yes. v31 says he did and other passages make clear Jesus expected repentance. Unlike some churches today who preach “tolerance” without a call to repentance. And yet these sinful people who needed to repent were drawn to Jesus. Prostitutes like the sinful woman at Simon the Pharisee's house. Tax collectors like Matthew & Zacheus. You see it throughout the gospels. Why? What drew them to Jesus? He was willing to associate with them. Associating with sinners was not acceptable in the society of his day. The Pharisees criticized him for it as we see here in Luke 5. It was a powerful statement that Jesus was even willing to go into their homes. He thus gained a reputation of being approachable by sinners; not a reputation shared by other religious leaders of his day. He offered forgiveness, mercy, their sins & guilt taken away. He gave them hope – they could change and be right with God. He had a reputation for love and compassion – a love that extended to anyone. Turn to Mat 11.

We can sum all of this up with today's theme scripture. In Mat 11, Jesus is talking about John the Baptist. H summarizes the hypocritical attitude of people toward JB and him in verses 18-19. [read] A friend of tax collectors and sinners. That was Jesus reputation. That was the criticism of him by the religious establishment. He was know as the Friend of Sinners. My question today for us: are we known as the Friend of Sinners? Are we willing to associate with unsavory people like Jesus did? Do we have that reputation? Turn to Luke 15.

The Prodigal Son

Do we still have “sinners” today in the sense used by the Pharisees? Unsavory types who “good” people don't associate with? American society as a whole is much more accepting of worldly behavior than Jewish society of Jesus day, but especially here

in the Bible Belt, we still have standards for who is considered outside the norm and unsavory. Who would that be? We still have prostitutes, don't we? Worldly people. Pagans. Drunkards. Carousers. People outside the law. Illegal aliens. Homosexuals (certainly pushing hard to be treated as the norm, but here in the South especially still considered outside the norm). How about young people who dress and act in unacceptable ways? When I was young, dressing and acting like a hippie with long hair and playing psychedelic rock music suggested you were unsavory and perhaps engaged in illegal/immoral behavior like free love and smoking pot or worse drugs. Today, I think dressing and acting like gangsta rappers or a gang member implies the same thing. You must be a criminal or at least you look and act like one and listen to music that glorifies such behavior. Like Obama's grandmother, we are afraid of young people like that. Who look and act like that.

Read Luke 15:1-2. The context of the Parable of the Prodigal Son is similar to the banquet at Matthew's house. Tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. Again the Pharisees and teachers of the law were critical and in reply Jesus tells the 3 parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Lost or Prodigal Son. Let me ask a question for us to think about. Are "sinners" drawn to the church today the way they were drawn to Jesus? We are the body of Christ; we have the Spirit of Christ living inside us. Are we like Jesus in this way? Are prostitutes and homosexuals and illegal aliens gathering around us to hear the message we have to offer? I won't ask for a show of hands, but my guess is we don't have a lot of prostitutes, homosexuals or illegal aliens here today. Maybe a few; but not many. I know this is convicting to me personally; I tend to be a Pharisee in my attitude, not a Friend of Sinners.

In the movie Jesus told the parable so we won't read the whole passage, but let's look again at the attitude of the Father in the parable. v20b-24. He sees his son long way off; perhaps looking and hoping for his return. He runs to meet him and throws his arms around him and kisses him. He threw a party. The Father shows us God's attitude toward sinners. Jesus show us the same. This was how he treated us when we were lost sinners. Is this our attitude toward sinful people? People who engage in wild living and squander their resources with prostitutes? I don't have all the answers on exactly how we draw sinners like Jesus did, but I know I personally need to be more warm and friendly to people who might otherwise seem unsavory to me; people I am tempted to shun; I need to be more welcoming to sinners the way Jesus was. We must call people to repentance, yes, but we must also have a reputation of welcoming anyone the way Jesus did. It is so easy to be self-righteous in calling for repentance instead of merciful, forgiving and compassionate like Jesus.

Jesus also talked about the older son. In the movie scene, who was that part of the parable for? The people outside the door. The "good" Jews. Pharisees, yes, but also Jesus disciples who didn't want to go into Matthew's house. It also applies to us. People who have decided to follow Jesus. Who have already repented of sin. Who live a more righteous life than most people in the world. Are we like the older son? Do we look down on sinners? Unsavory people. Our society is different from 1st Century Israel. In our society homosexual advocates claim it is "hate" to believe what the Bible teaches about sin. That kind of in your face opposition to the Bible sometimes tempts us to respond in kind and view sinners as part of some opposing camp that we don't associate with. Certainly we must have conviction and stand up for what the Bible teaches. But I

think also we have to be a friend of sinners like Jesus. Be willing to go to someone's house (even 2 someones of the same gender – sympathy card).

[SKIP IF TIME IS SHORT] Let's look at the Parable of the Prodigal Son in another way. What does it teach us as parents? We had a class on this parable in the parenting class last Winter. The parable's primary meaning is God's attitude toward sinners who repent. But as parents we can also learn from the parable how God feels as a father toward his wayward children and perhaps learn what our attitude should be. Do any of us have wayward children? Children like the younger son in the parable? Children who are drawn to the world and want to try out wild living as he did? Certainly we must teach them better, show them the consequences, do all we can to steer them the right way. Richard's class on Ecclesiastes has been terrific in this regard. While they are still under age and under our roof, we can and should also impose restrictions to protect them from the world and the consequences of sin. However, at some point, they grow up and make their own decisions and some of them may decide to try out the world. What should our attitude be? Like the Father, we should long and hope for their repentance and return. What memory of home will they have? Will they remember their parents' home as a good place they can return to? A place they will be taken back in? A place where there was love and joy and they were taken care of? Or will they only remember conflict. A place they ran from. A place they never want to return to. A place only of rules and self-righteousness. A place of hypocrisy with little love. Let's be sure we teach our children our faith, but if they don't accept it right away, let's also be sure we treat them like Jesus so they will want to return some day when they see the pigpen of the world.

Conclusion.

People must know we care before they can receive the message of repentance; we are not supposed to withhold love until they repent – that's what the Pharisees did. Not Jesus. Jesus was the friend of sinners. We must be too. Amen.