

Friend of Sinners

Dinner with Zacchaeus - Luke 19



series: The Jesus I Follow

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a `sinner.'"

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

- Luke 19:1-10

One of the things about Jesus that was confusing to many people was the fact that he was not particularly "religious." I mean, if anyone should be religious to the max, wouldn't you assume it would be the Messiah? After all, this is God's representative on earth. This person should embody all that is right and straight and pure, never breaking spiritual rules, never even hinting at anything scandalous. The distance between him and regular, run-of-the-mill heathens should be as great as possible. You would expect him to be untouchable and unapproachable by anyone but the most scrupulous, upright and law-abiding citizens.

You would think.

But you'd be wrong.

Read Matthew 9:10-15

- There are two scenes here (or one scene with two conversations). In the first, Jesus is having dinner with Matthew, his newest recruit. Who has a problem with this, why, and what is Jesus' response?



"Jesus challenges the Pharisees to "go and learn" from Hosea 6:6. Use of this formula may be slightly sarcastic--that those who prided themselves in their knowledge of and conformity to Scripture needed to "go and learn" what it means.

The Hebrew word for "mercy" is close in meaning to "faithful covenant love," which, according to Hosea, is more important than "sacrifice" (an aspect of ritual worship). As applied to the Pharisees by Jesus, therefore, the Hosea quotation was not simply telling them that they should be more sympathetic to outcasts and less concerned about ceremonial purity, but that they were being aligned with the apostates of ancient Israel in that they too were preserving the shell while losing the heart of the matter, as exemplified by their attitude to tax collectors and sinners."

- The NIV Bible Commentary

- In the second scene, another group of people are a bit confused by Jesus' behavior. What are they wondering, and how does Jesus explain things to them?

Read Luke 7:36-50

- What was the name of the dinner host?
- Why do you think this Pharisee originally invited Jesus to dinner?
- Does he seem receptive to Jesus' teaching?
- What is the essence of Jesus' lesson?

Read Luke 19:1-10

- What was the job of tax collectors in Israel, and why did the Jews dislike them? (You may want to consult a Bible dictionary for this.)
- How does Zacchaeus "initiate" with Jesus? What did you do to "move toward" God when you were a spiritual seeker?
- Contrast the attitude of Zacchaeus in this account with the attitude of the "observers" -
- Luke 19:10 has been widely recognized as the key verse in the book of Luke, (as Mark 10:45 is seen as the key verse in the book of Mark, and John 20:31 is the key verse in John's gospel). Why do you think it is the "key" verse?

The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners."

- Luke
7:33

Life Responses

1. On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being daily, 1 being never), how would you rate yourself in terms of being personally involved in friendships with unbelievers?
2. What would be more likely to happen: that people would accuse you of being too "worldly" because of your associations with non-Christians, or too isolated from the real world?
3. When is the last time a non-Christian confided in you because you were a "safe" person to talk to?
4. What is one thing you could do to become more involved with people who don't believe the way you do?

Jesus entered into the house of Zacchaeus and laid his hand upon the broken chords, and they vibrated with the music of a restored soul."

- G. Campbell
Morgan,
The Great Physician