

THE SINNER'S FRIEND

"And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Matt. 9:10-13.

Perhaps no fact is more convincingly established in the Bible than that Jesus is the friend of sinners. The earth's greatest man is the sinner's best friend. He is "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." The greatest individual, the greatest lover, the greatest sympathizer and the only Saviour are the friend of sinners, and His name is Jesus.

This text reveals the one great purpose of Christianity; the one over-mastering compassion of the life, the preaching, the teaching, and the death of our Lord. If Christianity is not primarily for the purpose of being a friend to sinners, then it has no purpose. Jesus is the friend of sinners.

Matthew, the publican, gave a dinner party with Jesus as the guest of honor. A group of Jesus' disciples and many publicans attended that party. What a target for the arrows of criticism from the bows of the Pharisees, who were the enemies of Jesus. They did not miss their opportunity to shoot those arrows. Certain facts about this party and feast are noteworthy.

1. It was a feast of resignation.

Matthew was leaving an old post of work forever. Many persons have been guests of honor at the completion of long terms of work. Their friends have given them dinner parties and spoken freely of what they had been and about what they had done in their positions. This dinner party, however, was different. It was given, not by a man at the end of his working years, but by a man who was comparatively young and who had ability and vigor. He was leaving a post of work of which he had become ashamed. He announced that he had resigned from his post under Caesar to accept a position with a homeless carpenter. The party, moreover, was not given to Matthew by his friends but rather it was planned by Matthew and given at his own expense.

At the time of Matthew's call he was the collector of customs at the port of Capernaum. This position from the standpoint of responsibility was an important one; nevertheless, it was looked upon with contempt by the better classes. It reminded them of their subjugation to Rome, a thing which was very unpleasant. Publicans were a very obnoxious set. A publican was a Jew who sold out to Rome. He was given the right to collect taxes from his fellow-Jews in a given area at a contract price. When he paid that price all the additional money he had collected became his personal property. The position was enormously profitable and extremely disgraceful. A man like Matthew sold out his place in the community; he lost his friends. He sold out his place in the synagogue; he was not a brother but an oppressor. He sold out his place as a citizen; patriotism was dead. He was living in ostracized prosperity. He was making money, but he was losing everything else that made life worthwhile.

2. It was a feast of declaration.

He declared himself openly for Jesus. That meant a lot. It meant leaving financial security for financial insecurity. That is a great test. Jesus said, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." When Jesus is the center of a Man's deepest affections it means a new understanding of God and a new attitude toward Him. It means a new attitude toward self and toward others.

3. It was a feast of introduction.

Matthew was introducing his fellow-publicans to Jesus. He was giving this feast for his old companions. He was about to leave them to devote himself fully to the service of the Saviour. He had known them long; he would not leave them without a token of good will; and, if at all possible, he wanted them to share in the great blessing which had changed the course of his life. Some of them may have met Jesus before. Some of them may have heard Him previously. At any rate, they could ask Him questions and hear His answers. The person whom Matthew introduced to his fellow-publicans, Jesus, was God's answer to the deep and demanding questions of the soul about God, sin, salvation, the meaning of life, responsibility and destiny.

4. It was a feast of dedication.

Matthew was henceforth out and out for Jesus and the Kingdom of God. Jesus had called Matthew to accompany Him in His campaigns. Matthew unquestionably appreciated the invitation although it carried with it hardship and self-denial.

I. The Proof That Jesus Is The Sinner's Friend.

1. His words argue it.

It was to a poor sinner, a woman caught in the act of adultery, that Jesus said, "Go and sin no more." To sinners He declared, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." To the self-righteous of His day He said, "I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." Christianity is a redemptive religion and that is its glory and best defense.

2. His life shows it.

He spent most of His time among the disreputable, the lepers, the outcast, the besmirched and the sinners. He turned from the self-righteous to the unrighteous. He ate and drank with men of questionable occupation, and even with those of notoriously bad character. He did not simply show Himself kindly disposed toward such people, but He associated with them. This conduct of our Lord was regarded as scandalous by the religious people of His day. Jesus associated with persons of bad character in the hope of saving them and elevating them. He compared Himself to a physician who does not pay his visits to healthy people.

3. His compassion demonstrates it.

He saw the multitudes lost, and wandering as sheep without a shepherd, and He had compassion on them. His compassion burned for all classes, the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the moral and the immoral, the do-wells and the ne'er do-wells. Is not that the spirit and the purpose of Christianity?

"Jesus, Thou art all compassion
Pure, unbounded love Thou art;
Visit us with Thy salvation;
Enter every trembling heart."

4. His deeds prove it.

He found Matthew the publican and made him an apostle. He found him a sinner and wrote his name in the Lamb's Book of Life. He ate and drank with the ignorant and fallen and excommunicated until they felt at home with Him, and were not repulsed when He taught them things which they needed most of all to know. He went about doing good in such a brotherly, noble, lowly way that they felt He was among them as one who understood them, as one who blessed them and did not condemn and curse them; and so it came to pass that "all the publicans and sinners drew near to hear Him."

5. His death confirms it.

"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust." God had but one purpose in sending Christ into the world and to Calvary, and that was the salvation of the lost everywhere. What agony He suffered on that cross! The blood ran down His wounded body to the ground, the sun refused to shine, the curtain in the Temple was rent in twain. The earth shook and the graves were opened. All this was in the interest of the lost.

"Come, every soul by sin oppressed,
There's mercy with the Lord,
And He will surely give your rest
By trusting in His Word."

6. His love seals it.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Therefore, the poet could sing:

"Love lifted me!
Love lifted me!
When nothing else could help,
Love lifted me!"

II. The Strength of His Friendship.

When you have a friend you want to know the strength of his friendship. Jesus demonstrated the strength of His friendship in different ways.

1. In the multiplicity of His provisions.

He is able to provide anything the sinner or the saint may need, all the way from salvation to glorification. His provisions are abundant and measureless. He had made provisions sufficient to chart your course from the cradle to the grave; from earth to heaven. His provisions are ample for the salvation, the duty and the destiny of everyone. He provides means of transportation from sin to salvation, from despair to delight, from poverty to riches, from squalor to bountifulness, from darkness to light, from serfdom to freedom, from hell to a home in heaven. He has salvation for the lost, liberation for prisoner, consolation for the sorrowing, bread for the hungry, and water for the thirsty.

2. In His limitless power.

"All power is given unto Me," said Jesus. His power is manifested in creation, in the upholding of things, in healing diseases, in stilling the tempest, in His resurrection, but most of all in forgiving sins. He loves sinners and He saves sinners. He has the power to cool the burning fever, to furnish a bright light for death's dark valley, to give a soft pillow on which to rest the dying head, to extract the sting of death, and to furnish the passport to the entrance of heaven.

3. In His plan of salvation.

It is a simple plan. One does not have to be a philosopher in order to understand it. It is so simple that "the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein." It is an inexpensive plan, so far as man is concerned, and He says, "Come, ye, buy, and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price." Thus the poor are not excluded, but urgently entreated to come to Him for life. It takes in all classes, all tongues, all colors, all conditions, and all degrees of sinners. His plan of salvation is the old way, the new way, the narrow way, the safe way, and the only way.

Unsaved friends, Jesus died to save you. He loves you. He is your dearest friend. You can accept Him and you should do so now. All of life will be different, better, nobler, and more useful if you will trust Him and be saved. He invites you to do so.

"Come, and He will give you rest;
Trust Him, for His word is plain;
He will take the sinfulest;
Christ receiveth sinful men."