

Jesus Friend of Sinners

How many of you have close friends that you've known for more than 10 years? How about 20 years? Friendships are great. I've got friends that I've grown up with and they're like family. People you can just be yourself with, you know, just be a complete idiot and there's no judgment. It's nice to have people like that in your life.

There were two religious leaders in the same town who became good friends, one was a Catholic Priest and the other a Jewish Rabbi. They met up at the town's annual 4th of July picnic, and as good friends do, they began their usual banter.

"This baked ham is really delicious," the priest teased the rabbi. "You really ought to try it. I know it's against your religion, but I can't understand why such a wonderful food should be forbidden! You don't know what you're missing. Tell me, Rabbi, when are you going to break down and try it?"

The rabbi looked at the priest with a big grin, and said, *"At your wedding."*

The Bible tells us there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother (Proverbs 18:24). We know that ultimately points to Jesus Christ. And I love reading through the Gospels and seeing how Jesus was just so approachable by all people. And usually He was the One instigating these meetings and opportunities to fellowship with the often overlooked of society.

This happened so much that He was given the title, *Friend of Sinners*. This is seen in **Luke 7:34**, *"The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'"*

It's Jesus that said this, but He's quoting what the Religious Leaders were saying about Him. Interestingly, the people that confronted or opposed Jesus the most were these Religious Leaders. They looked down on people like these tax collectors (whom they saw as swindlers and traitors). They looked down on the obvious sinners. These religious leaders should have been the one's opening the way to God for these individuals, but they cast them aside with judgment. And now they're doing the same with Jesus!

But I love that as we go through the Gospels in the Bible, we see Jesus time and time again hanging out with the marginalized. He's hanging out with the people that were overlooked or considered dirty by the religious establishment.

So, I want to take a bit of time today to look at a couple accounts of Jesus being a friend to sinners.

Jesus set this mission and mandate early on in His ministry. Notice what we read in **Luke 5:27–32**, *“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.”²⁸ So he left all, rose up, and followed Him.²⁹ 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.³⁰ And their scribes and the Pharisees complained against His disciples, saying, “Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”³¹ Jesus answered and said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.³² I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.””*

Jesus came for sinners. He truly was a friend of sinners.

And He wasn't just a friend to sinners, He was a friend to all.

Let's go back to Luke 7:36. A Pharisee invites Jesus to his house. Remember, Jesus has just finished mildly rebuking the Pharisees and the religious establishment.

- If I were Jesus, I would be thinking either: *that's going to be an awkward dinner*, or I'd be thinking, *You need to go home and think about what I said. When you're ready to admit you're wrong, then we can get together!*
- But Jesus willingly goes. It's the Pharisees and religious leaders that's giving Him all the problems. Though they've rejected the will of God (vs. 30), Jesus is not rejecting them!
- And it becomes a great opportunity for Jesus to reveal His heart for sinners.

So let's continue on in Luke 7 and see what takes place.

Luke 7:36–40, *“Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat.³⁷ And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil,³⁸ and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil.³⁹ Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he*

spoke to himself, saying, “This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner.”⁴⁰ And Jesus answered and said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” So he said, “Teacher, say it.””

Now in this day and culture, whenever a person of importance came to a home, the house was basically opened up for people to come and listen into the conversation and hear what is being taught or spoken. And social custom allowed those in need to come near and partake of some of the leftovers.

- Perhaps this was after a Synagogue service. Maybe Jesus was teaching that Sabbath in the synagogue and was invited to this guy's house for lunch. So, people were dropping in not only to hear a rabbi, but certainly to hear from Jesus! People had been talking about Him and news of Jesus was rapidly spreading.

And this woman comes in. She's identified as a sinner. Some have speculated what it was that caused her to be labeled that way. Most likely she was a prostitute. And though a person's home was open during an important person's visit, she wouldn't have been too welcomed around here. This took some boldness for her to come in and approach Jesus. I'm sure she knew what kind of response she would get from the religious leaders – and in case you're wondering, it wouldn't have been a nice one. But more so, she knew what kind of response she would get from Jesus – the friend of sinners.

So she comes in with her ***alabaster flask of fragrant oil...*** This was a common accessory for a prostitute to have, but also common for woman in general to carry around their necks as a deodorizing agent of sorts. You just didn't have your 'degree always fresh stick' in this day, so you had to get creative. This did the job.

And this woman ***stood at His feet behind Him....*** Now that seems kind of odd because it says Jesus sat at the table. Is this woman crawling under the table and trying to get to His feet?

- In this day, the tables were low to the ground, they didn't sit at tables with chairs. Rather they reclined up to them. They would lay propped up on their elbow, with their feet extending away from the table – in this day a wise thing to do. Not only did it keep dirty feet as far away from the food, but I think it also aided in just allowing the food to settle and digest. Try it

sometime. When I want to supersize my McDonalds meal, I'll just recline on their seat and you can pack it in quite nicely.

So, this woman comes in, spots where Jesus is, and comes up behind Him. And she's overcome with emotion. She starts weeping, washing His feet with these tears. There's no towel, so she lets her hair down.

- For a woman to do so in public was a real disgrace, it was a sign of looseness. Woman could be divorced for doing so. But she doesn't care about public opinion, she's caring about this One who has touched her life.

And then finally, she breaks open this flask and anoints His feet with this fragrant oil.

- "Normally this oil would be used in anointing a person's head. And most likely this perfume was quite costly. But she poured it out on the feet of Jesus, as if to say, 'the best perfume for my head is only good enough to use on Your feet.'" (Guzik)

This woman is demonstrating a changed life. We're not sure how this happened, but we can assume she has heard Jesus speaking in the past, or has even had an encounter with Jesus where He ministered to her in love and grace.

So, Simon, the Pharisee that invited Jesus, witnesses this going down and he begins to think judgmentally in his mind.

- **Luke 7:39**, *"Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, 'This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner.'"*
- He starts condemning Jesus internally that He should know better. If He was who He says He is, then He wouldn't allow this woman to touch Him, for she's a scoundrel – a dirty sinner.

Now I love this, Jesus knows exactly what's going on. Whether something is said verbally, or whether it's just a thought, whatever it was, He calls Simon out.

- **Luke 7:40–43**, *"And Jesus answered and said to him, 'Simon, I have something to say to you.' So he said, 'Teacher, say it.'"⁴¹ "There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty."⁴² And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?"⁴³ Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have rightly judged."*

Great question. Jesus had a way of asking the right thing to kind of stop people in their tracks. It was like no matter how you answered it you were kind of caught. Simon here is getting to realize this. He says, *‘Well, I suppose the one whom he forgave more.’* No duh! Answer that with some confidence Simon! But I think he’s beginning to see where Jesus was taking this.

Luke 7:44–50, *“Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. ⁴⁵ You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. ⁴⁶ You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. ⁴⁷ Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.” ⁴⁸ Then He said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” ⁴⁹ And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” ⁵⁰ Then He said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.””*

Jesus just puts it out there: *Simon, you showed no love, no care, no appreciation for who I am.* Not that Jesus is wanting to be doted on – He’s not looking for a spa treatment or anything, but He’s simply revealing the attitude in Simon’s heart in comparison to what this woman was feeling.

And the difference was in the way they viewed themselves.

- Simon saw himself as righteous, the moral police. The guy that everybody else had to be like.
- This woman saw herself as unclean, unworthy, unaccepted. But in Jesus she found acceptance, worth, forgiveness. Her life was completely flipped around.

Simon couldn’t see His need for Jesus. The woman couldn’t see her life without Jesus!

So Jesus proclaims, ***her sins, which are many, are forgiven...*** This is in the past tense. It’s implying, her sins (though many) are already forgiven. She came to this house filled with gratitude for what Jesus had already done, and she showers Him with extravagant love. This extravagant love was connected to Jesus’ extravagant forgiveness.

Simon, through his own self-righteousness, couldn't see his need for Jesus. His love was little. But this woman could only see this undeserving grace that she was shown. Her love was great!

- If you ever feel your love for the Lord lacking, perhaps you've forgotten what a wretch you were. You see, the greater we see our sin, the greater we see what an incredible debt Jesus paid on our behalf.
- We didn't deserve any of it. We were all guilty – deserving of death. But Jesus came, sought us out, and saved us!
- When we realize we were forgiven much, we will love much. Don't ever think that you were an easy save. Don't think you had done most of the work, and Jesus just had to put His stamp of approval on you. He had to die for you every bit as much as He had to die for the murdering, adulterous, stealing, sinner. In God's eyes there's nothing that separates me from that person. I have been forgiven much! You have been forgiven much! May our love for Jesus, the friend of sinners, be great!

Jesus all through His life showed this heart for the sinner.

He would travel to Samaria when Jews would typically avoid it, so that He could meet an immoral woman at the well and change her life.

He would reach out and touch the leper that was subjected to isolation to reveal His love and compassion.

He would minister to the despised and rejected to share His love for every soul.

Through His whole ministry, this objective never changed. Sadly, neither did the attitude of the religious leaders.

For one more account, let's turn to **Luke 19:1–7**, *“Then Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. ² Now behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. ³ And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature. [just give me a minute, this is one of my favorite stories. In it we see Jesus reaching out and showing grace to a short man. It's beautiful! 😊]*

⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that way. ⁵ And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, “Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.” ⁶ So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully. ⁷ But when they saw it, they all complained, saying, “He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner.””

Those are wonderful words aren't they? *He has gone to be a guest with a sinner.* This was a big deal in this day. Because to share a meal with someone meant that you were becoming one with them. You would be tainting yourself in this act. The Pharisees are appalled.

- Yet it's what Jesus, the friend of sinners, does for all of us.
- **Revelation 3:20**, *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."*
- Jesus wants to bring us into fellowship with Him.

Zacchaeus became a changed man (**Luke 19:8–10**). He now knows that Jesus came to *seek and to save that which was lost* (Luke 19:10).

As I said, Jesus never stopped doing that. Even in the last hours of His life. Just a few chapters over in Luke, as Jesus is being crucified, He prays in **Luke 23:34**, *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do..."*

As He was there hanging on the cross, one criminal beside Him said, *"Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."* (Luke 23:42)

- Jesus didn't reply with, *"Listen this is not a good time for me right now."* Or, *"Sorry, you're a little late."*
- Jesus said, *"Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."* Jesus extended grace to this sinner. This is why Jesus came.

Through His whole life and ministry Jesus showed Himself a Friend of Sinners. To that I am ever so grateful.

Application

1. Are we being a friend of sinners? Do we love those that are marginalized in our society unconditionally and without judgment? Do we seek to show grace and the opportunity to be forgiven through Jesus Christ? This was the mission of Jesus and it should be ours as well.
2. If we are going to reach out and be a friend to sinners, we need to see how great our need was for the Friend of Sinners. Do we see our need for Jesus? Do we love much simply because we see that we have been forgiven much? This will always be the measure of our love. My love for Jesus and others

increases as I see my unworthiness and the great price He paid for my forgiveness.

3. Perhaps you are hearing this today and feeling like you could never be accepted by Jesus. That you've blown it too much and have too much guilt. I'm here to tell you that Jesus died on a cross for you to pay the penalty for your sin and erase your guilt and shame. Forgiveness is found in Him. There's no amount of sin that His death cannot wipe out. But you need to do something about it. You need to see your sin. You need to admit that you are guilty of breaking God's commandments. You need to repent, which means to turn away from that life of sin and self and turn to Jesus. And you need to receive Him today as your Saviour and Lord. He's offering you a free gift of salvation – no strings attached. Will you come to Him today for forgiveness and new life?