

# Jesus, the Friend of Sinners

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## Key Scripture

Luke 5:31-32 (ESV) And Jesus answered them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

## Sermon in One Sentence

Jesus, the divine Physician, extends His gracious, redemptive friendship not to the self-proclaimed righteous, but to those who humbly acknowledge their spiritual sickness and desperate need for His saving call.

## Introduction

Imagine a prestigious dinner party, an exclusive gathering where only the most revered, the most influential, the most "unblemished" are invited. Now, imagine a notorious outcast – someone scorned, perhaps even reviled by society – not only crashes this party but is then warmly embraced by the host, even publicly declared a friend. How would the other guests react? This scenario, though fictional, perfectly captures the scandal and revolutionary nature of Jesus Christ's ministry. His most persistent accusers labeled Him, perhaps with a sneer, "a friend of sinners" (Matthew 11:19, Luke 7:34).

This accusation, intended as a damning indictment, becomes, for us, the most comforting and hopeful truth. In a world that often isolates and condemns, where our failures and shortcomings can lead to profound loneliness and shame, Jesus stands as the one whose affection for broken people defies all human expectation. He doesn't merely tolerate sinners; He befriends them, drawing near to those whom society, and often even religion, pushes away.

Today, we delve into the heart of this radical truth, exploring what it means for Jesus to be the "friend of sinners" and, more importantly, what this profound reality means for each one of us who recognize our own sinfulness. Our passage today is found in Luke's Gospel, where Jesus himself clarifies the divine purpose behind His controversial associations.

## Historical & Biblical Context

Luke, often identified as a Gentile physician, meticulously documented the life and ministry of Jesus, aiming to provide an “orderly account” for Theophilus (Luke 1:3-4). His Gospel places particular emphasis on Jesus' compassion for the marginalized, the poor, and yes, the sinners. This narrative of Jesus calling Matthew, a tax collector (Luke 5:27-28), and subsequently dining with "a large company of tax collectors and others" (Luke 5:29) sets the immediate scene for our key scripture. Tax collectors were despised by the Jewish people—they were seen as Roman collaborators, extortionists, and morally corrupt. For a rabbi, let alone the Messiah, to associate with them was scandalous.

The Pharisees and scribes, the religious elite of the day, observed this with disdain, questioning Jesus' disciples: "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" (Luke 5:30). Their question exposes their self-righteousness and misunderstanding of God's redemptive heart. Jesus' response in Luke 5:31-32, therefore, is not merely a retort but a profound theological declaration. It succinctly explains *why* He associates with sinners, laying bare the very mission of His incarnation. It matters today because it corrects our natural human inclination towards self-justification and elitism, revealing God's true disposition towards a fallen humanity.

## **Main Point I — The Scandal of Divine Association: Why He Eats with Them**

**Scripture:** Luke 5:29-30 And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

The very act of Jesus sharing a meal with tax collectors and "sinners" was a profound statement, a social and spiritual scandal to the religious establishment. In that culture, sharing a meal was an intimate act, signifying fellowship, acceptance, and even solidarity. For Jesus, a respected teacher, to sit down with individuals deemed morally bankrupt was to openly flout social conventions and religious purity laws, or so it seemed to His critics. The grumbling of the Pharisees reveals their indignation at this perceived defilement; they believed association with such "unholy" people would corrupt Jesus, rather than Jesus bringing holiness to them.

But Jesus' actions were intentional and deeply symbolic. He wasn't simply ignoring social norms; He was actively subverting them to demonstrate God's inclusive grace. By dining with these outcasts, Jesus was not condoning their sin but extending an invitation to repentance and restoration that no one else would. He was demonstrating that God's love reaches beyond the boundaries of human-made righteousness, embracing those who were most aware of their brokenness. This act foreshadowed the greater spiritual feast of salvation, where all are welcome, not based on merit, but on mercy.

## **Main Point II — The Great Physician's Diagnosis: The Sick Need a Doctor**

**Scripture:** Luke 5:31 And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick."

Jesus' immediate response to the Pharisees' accusation is a masterful analogy, powerfully asserting the divine logic behind His mission. He positions Himself as a physician and humanity as patients. The implication is clear: sin is a spiritual sickness, a pervasive illness that infects the soul. Just as a physical doctor goes to clinics and hospitals, among the sick, not health clubs, Jesus, the spiritual Physician, goes to those who are suffering from the terminal illness of sin.

This analogy directly challenges the Pharisees' self-perception. In their own eyes, they were "well"—spiritually healthy, righteous, and free from the need of a physician. They saw themselves as those who had meticulously followed the law, thus earning God's favor. But Jesus implies a deeper truth: their very self-righteousness was a profound symptom of their spiritual blindness, perhaps the most dangerous form of spiritual sickness. True health, according to Jesus, begins with recognizing one's sickness and

admitting the desperate need for a cure.

## Main Point III — The Divine Summons: Calling Sinners to Repentance

**Scripture:** Luke 5:32 I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.

The climax of Jesus' explanation reveals the ultimate purpose of His controversial associations: He came to "call sinners to repentance." This is not merely a social call, but a divine summons, an authoritative invitation to a radical change of mind and direction. Repentance isn't just feeling sorry for one's sins; it's a fundamental turning away from self-reliance and sin, and a turning towards God in faith and obedience. Jesus' mission is profoundly evangelistic and transformative.

Crucially, Jesus states He has "not come to call the righteous." This is not to say that genuinely righteous people don't need a Savior, but rather, it addresses those who *believe themselves* to be righteous and, consequently, see no need for repentance. Such self-sufficiency is the greatest barrier to receiving God's grace. Jesus offers His friendship and salvation to those who acknowledge their spiritual bankruptcy, who are willing to admit their need for forgiveness and transformation. His call is universal, extending to all who recognize their sinful state and are willing to turn to Him for healing and eternal life.

### Illustration

A story is told of the great missionary Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission. He was once invited to speak at a church in England. The minister, seeking to impress the congregation, introduced Taylor by extolling his heroic efforts, sacrifices, and selflessness in China, praising him as a model Christian. When Taylor rose to speak, visibly uncomfortable, he began by saying, "Dear friends, I am the chief of sinners—but through the grace of God, I am saved." He understood, deeply, that his accomplishments were secondary to his status as a redeemed sinner, a recipient of God's unmerited favor, echoing Paul's words in 1 Timothy 1:15. This humility, this acknowledgement of personal sin despite outward good works, is precisely the posture Jesus calls for and befriends.

### Practical Application

- 1. Examine Your Own Self-Righteousness:** Take time this week to honestly assess areas where you might be judgmental of others, particularly those outside your comfort zone or religious circles. Confess any pride or self-righteousness that prevents you from extending grace.
- 2. Embrace Your Identity as a Sinner Saved by Grace:** Remind yourself daily that your standing before God is not based on your works or perceived goodness, but entirely on Christ's atoning sacrifice. This frees you from the burden of perfection and empowers you to minister to others from a place of humility and gratitude.
- 3. Actively Seek Out and Befriend Those on the Margins:** Following Jesus' example, look for opportunities to build genuine relationships with people whom society, or even the church, might overlook or exclude. Share a meal, listen to their stories, and demonstrate Christ's unconditional love.

**4. Practice Repentance Daily:** True repentance is not a one-time event but a continuous posture of turning from sin and towards God. Identify a specific sin you need to turn from this week and intentionally pursue God's will in that area, trusting in His forgiveness and power to change you.

## Discussion Questions

1. What societal or religious groups today might be considered "tax collectors and sinners," and how does the church sometimes distance itself from them?
2. How does Jesus' analogy of the "physician" challenge our understanding of spiritual health and our need for God's grace?
3. What does "repentance" genuinely mean for you, and how does recognizing your own sinfulness open you up to Jesus' friendship?
4. In what tangible ways can we, as followers of Christ, become "friends of sinners" in our own communities, reflecting Jesus' heart?

## Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the audacious and scandalous grace of Your Son, Jesus, who did not shrink from our brokenness but fully embraced it. Forgive us for our own self-righteousness and the ways we have judged or distanced ourselves from those You came to save. Open our eyes, soften our hearts, and empower us by Your Holy Spirit to be faithful reflections of Jesus, the Friend of Sinners, drawing all to Your loving embrace. Amen.

## Benediction

Go now, not as the self-sufficient, but as healed patients, called to repentance, to extend the radical friendship of Jesus Christ to a world desperately in need of His saving grace.