

Hanging Out With Sinners

"Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners."

Matthew 11:1 (NIV)

One of the worst slurs you could place on a person's character and reputation in Jesus' day was to call him/her a friend of tax collectors. This is exactly the reputation Jesus earned from certain of His people when He walked among us. He hung out with the wrong crowd, according to certain people who felt themselves very just and good in God's sight because they avoided those who knew they were sinners. They would not dream of having conversation with people who had messed up morally and ethically. They saw themselves as the pure and righteous and kept to themselves.

Jesus addressed the issue of His social contacts very directly when He said that when John the Baptist performed his ministry he did not party or drink with anyone, he simply showed up in time to preach and the critics took issue with him. Then Jesus said that He came to the parties and drank with the people and they still found fault. In other words, no social behaviour pleased His critics.

This reminds me of the story of the wife who could not please her husband no matter how hard she tried. One morning she asked him how he wanted his eggs done. He responded with "One easy over and the other sunny side up." When she put the eggs down before him exactly cooked as he asked he still complained. When she asked what was the matter he said that she had flipped the wrong egg. There is no pleasing some people no matter how hard you try.

This was the problem that Jesus had. No matter what He did, He was going to be taken apart by

those who did not like Him. It is fascinating that Jesus chose to mingle with people of a bad reputation more so than with those whose lives were at least outwardly holy. On another occasion Jesus spoke about not having come to call righteous people but sinners to repentance. He claimed that His work was to mingle among the ones who had strayed from their Creator and call them back to the God who made them. He was pleased to have the reputation that had been pinned on him in scorn.

Jesus never wanted us to get the idea He approved of the sins of these people. His mission was to those who were ready to get rid of the disease of sin and seek to be whole.

Jesus is especially seen with people who are social misfits in the Gospel of Luke. Being a doctor, Luke saw people who were sick and in need. He did not have much time for patients who were healthy and really not in need of his services. So when Luke came to write his biography of Jesus he would naturally turn to the situations of Jesus with the needy. Jesus took up this idea when He compared Himself to a physician and said that people who are well do not need a physician but those who were sick. The point being that only those sick of soul would recognize their genuine and even desperate need of Him.

I am hoping that my readers today see themselves as needy and unable to help themselves. At times when I visit an unchurched person in the hospital I will use the following analogy. I will remind them that when they discovered symptoms in their time of illness they came to the

hospital to be put right. They knew they could not deal with the problem and submitted to the medical community to do it all for them. It is the same with our souls. The Bible says we are all sick of soul and in need of healing we cannot produce in ourselves. We need the hospital of the church where the spiritual medicine is to be found. We ought to submit ourselves wholly to this Physician of the soul who is exalted every Sunday in the music and preaching. We must see ourselves as utterly dependent on Him alone for our cure from the disease of sin.

Have you thought about how and why Jesus hung out with sinners? Do you see yourself as a good candidate for Jesus to come to so you can receive the help He alone can give?

Do you feel yourself outcast, ignored, of no value in good society? Whatever your estate, however far you may have been off the mark in life, no matter what way you have failed, Jesus is the One for you. He especially loves people who are broken and bruised from the hard knocks of life. He tenderly calls shipwrecks to Himself.

Jesus is good enough to hang with the dregs of society. Are you willing to be His companion regardless of the fact you have nothing to offer Him in return? Will you come just as you are and ask Him to fill your empty life, mend your broken heart, clean you up and make you a new person?

Jesus hangs out with sinners are you one of them?