

Sunday, March 19, 2017

“Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!” (Luke 7:34)

Since we began preaching on the streets of this nation, one of the most consistent rallying cries that we have heard from the enemies of God has been some form of “Jesus was a friend of sinners.” Sometimes it is “Jesus hung out with sinners.” Or sometimes “Jesus was friends with prostitutes.” But it’s always a variation on the same theme.

So what do these people mean when they say this? It’s not just a simple statement – it’s a loaded accusation. There is meaning behind the words, and I think it’s important to get to the bottom of it, because we don’t want to be ignorant of Satan’s devices. One of his devices is to try to wear the people of God down by repeating the same perversion of the truth over and over and over. We may have some people who are young in the faith who could be led astray by such an assault. Satan, remember, is a master of taking a grain of truth and turning it into a fleshly, worldly perversion.

The grain of truth in this case is that Jesus was, in fact, a friend of sinners...but not every sinner. He couldn’t be in the world without being around sinners. The men who He spent the most time with (His apostles) were, like all of us, sinners. In that sense, He was indeed a friend of sinners. But there’s no mystery here in who His friends were – He told us exactly who they were. His friends are the people for whom He died. They are the people who follow His commandments.

“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you...” (John 15:13-16)

He then proceeds to make it manifest that there is clear line of demarcation between His friends and the rest of the world:

“If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before *it hated* you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.” (John 15:18-19)

So I ask again – what do these messengers of Satan mean when they say that Jesus was a friend of sinners? Or that Jesus “hung out” with sinners? It could mean a variety of things, depending on who is saying it.

The works-righteous Pharisees, when they called Jesus a friend of sinners, meant, “Jesus associates with notorious, proud sinners, He participates in their sin with them, He encourages them in their sin, and if He was really holy, if He was really the Messiah, He wouldn’t be doing this.” Of course, it was a false accusation – remember, in the same sentence they were also falsely accusing him of being a glutton and a winebibber. They were essentially accusing Him of being a friend of the world, and therefore an enemy of God.

“Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.” (James 4:4)

Frequently, nowadays, we see the other end of the spectrum. When people say He was a friend of sinners, they sometimes mean, “Jesus liked to hang around sinners and partake in their sin. He liked a good party. Remember, He turned the water into wine in Cana – He must be OK with hanging out and getting drunk. You guys need to loosen up and act like Jesus did.” A few years ago, there was an editorial in USA Today about baking cakes for same-sex weddings. The article ends like this: “‘What would Jesus do?’ I think he’d bake the cake.” And you probably won’t be surprised to find that a majority of people in this God-hating country believe that Jesus Christ was a sinner.

And then you have people who are somewhere in the middle who mean, “Jesus hung out with sinners, but He was really nice to them and never judged them. He never told them it was OK to sin, but He also never told them not to sin. He accepted them for who they were.” Or, “Jesus hung out with sinners, and we’re all sinners, so you shouldn’t preach to them to stop sinning.” You get the picture.

So, it’s anybody’s guess what any given person means when they come up to us and start flapping their gums about Jesus and His interaction with sinners, but you can be guaranteed that they are accusing us of something: either being holier-than-thou, or not being holy enough, or something in between. I think the accusation of being holier-than-thou is most common, but I think we can all recall examples where we’ve heard accusations all across the spectrum. Whatever they mean, the fact is that they despise the underlying doctrines that we preach, and that’s what their problem with us is. Let’s look at the context of Luke 7:34:

“And the Lord said, Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? They are like unto children sitting in the marketplace, and calling one to another,

and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept. For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil. The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners! But wisdom is justified of all her children.” (Luke 7:31-35)

One of the main points of that passage is that when people don't like what is being preached, they are always going to find something that they think is wrong with the way that it's being preached. The Lord sends different people with different dispositions to preach His Word, and no matter how they preach, wicked men will reproach and malign them. Let me be clear that we can (and frequently do) sin in the act of preaching, so we can't let ourselves off the hook and say, "well, they just don't like the doctrines." What I am saying, though, is no matter how careful we are, no matter how closely we adhere to the standards of God in our behavior, the messengers of Satan will always find some reason to reproach us. They cannot bear to have the sovereignty of God preached to them, and they cannot stand to have their sins preached against and repentance required of them.

Amid all of the reproaches and accusations, though, one valid concern for us is that we will forget that we are also sinners who were saved by grace, and are undeserving of mercy. We need to make sure that we do not actually become holier-than-thou (which, incidentally, is a phrase that comes from the Bible: "Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou" – Isaiah 65:5). The apostles reminded us of that on multiple occasions, so we wouldn't forget it. For example:

“For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, *and* hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” (Titus 3:3-7)

But we can't use that as an excuse to not preach! We can't use it as an excuse to be cowardly or unfaithful. We are ambassadors and stewards. Our job is to faithfully preach the Word of God. And Satan's goal is to try to shame us into silence. So on the one hand, we have to guard against being hypocrites and forgetting the great mercy that God has had on us. But on the other hand, we can't become catatonic and stop preaching just because someone might think that we look like hypocrites. Remember, the command is, "Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye." (Matthew 7:5). We're supposed to cast the mote out of our brother's eye.

We're supposed to preach. We're just not supposed to do it in hypocrisy and with a censorious spirit. And how, my friends, can we love our neighbors if we don't rebuke them when they sin? (Leviticus 19:17-18). If you don't tell your neighbor to stop sinning when you see him sin, you are adding to your own sin. You are the wicked and slothful servant who hid the talent in the earth (Matthew 25:25-27).

So, moving on, Jesus was not a friend of sinners in the way that the Pharisees meant it. He's not a friend of sinners in the way that the vast majority of people today mean it. When we have a Satanic perversion of the truth regularly assailing us, the only remedy is to turn to the Word and see what it actually says. Otherwise, you will be "carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (Ephesians 4:14).

The very idea that Jesus supported sinners and accepted them as they were, and in fact was a partaker in their sins, is such a repulsive idea. It is contrary to the whole gospel (e.g., "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." – 2 Timothy 2:19). It is contrary to how Jesus behaved (e.g., "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth." – 1 Peter 2:21-22). And it is contrary to what Jesus preached (e.g., "Go and sin no more." – John 8:11). So, I'd like to go through the public ministry of Jesus Christ and talk a little bit about how He interacted with sinners, and what He preached.

One of the first things He did when He started His public ministry was to drive the moneychangers out of the temple with a whip, pour their money out, overthrow their tables, and say, "Make not my Father's house an house of merchandise." (John 2:13-16). And one of the last things He did at the end of His public ministry was to cast the moneychangers out of the temple, overthrow their tables, and say, "It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves." (Matthew 21:12-13, Mark 11:15-17, Luke 19:45-46). It's notable that in the Matthew account, right after He did this, "the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple; and He healed them." (Matthew 21:14). This is somewhat of a microcosm showing the stark contrast between how Jesus behaved towards presumptuous sinners, and how He behaved towards penitent sinners.

In between the two cleansings of the temple, Jesus preached time and again against sin and sinners. For example, in the famous John 3 chapter:

"He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than

light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.”
(John 3:18-21)

And then we have the sermon on the mount (Matthew 5-7, Luke 6). People refer to it like it was some ethereal love fest where everyone sat around cross-legged on the side of the mountain, beating drums and singing kumbaya. But this was a sermon where He preached strongly against sin. People love to cherry pick and pervert a few verses from this sermon (e.g., “Love your enemies” or “Judge not”) and pretend like the rest of it doesn’t exist. But remember, it is in this sermon that He lays down an even harder standard than they thought they needed to bear under the Mosaic Code. It’s not only a sin to kill someone...it’s a sin to even be angry with your brother without a cause (Matthew 5:22). It’s not only a sin to commit adultery...you’ve already committed it in your heart if you even look on a woman to lust after her (Matthew 5:28). This sermon is one of the places where He preaches against divorce and remarriage, saying it is adultery (Matthew 5:32). This is a sermon where, in describing the goodness of God, He tells all His listeners that they are evil (Matthew 7:11). And then He proceeds to teach that most people will go to hell (Matthew 7:13-14), including the workers of iniquity (i.e., proud sinners) who claim to follow Him (Matthew 7:21-23). The Lord Jesus Christ was not a sugar-coater. No doubt, He teaches many great truths in this sermon, but preaching the standards of God as they relate to sin and sinners is one of the key messages.

Elsewhere, He refers to that generation that He lived among as vipers, evil, adulterous, wicked, unrepentant, faithless, perverse, and sinful. He preaches very strongly against the sins of the scribes and Pharisees to their face, and, in their presence, uses them as examples to the multitude of how not to behave (e.g., Matthew 15 and 23, Mark 7 and 12, Luke 20). His testimony is that the works of the world are evil (John 7:7) and that they would die in their sins if they do not believe in Him as the Messiah (John 8:24). He says that whoever commits sin is the servant of sin, and that He is the only one who can set them free from that bondage (John 8:34-36). He preaches against sins like fornication, evil thoughts, murder, adultery, lying, blasphemy, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, pride, and foolishness (Matthew 15:19, Mark 7:21-22, Luke 12:15). He warns against turning aside to pursue your sins, and having the day of the Lord come upon you unawares (Luke 21:34). And He said that if you love Him, then keep His commandments (John 14:15, 21, 23-24, John 15:10).

I’d like to spend the rest of this sermon briefly looking at several incidents that we find in the four gospels:

1. Calling Matthew (Levi) to follow Him

2. The woman anointing Jesus
3. Eating with publicans and sinners
4. Abiding With Zacchaeus
5. The Samaritan woman at the well
6. The woman taken in adultery
7. The multitude of miracles and healings that He performed

Calling Matthew (Levi)

Matthew (also called Levi) was a publican. One day, as he was sitting at the receipt of custom, Jesus came to him and commanded him to follow Him, so he arose, left everything behind, and followed Him. Some time thereafter, Matthew prepared Him a great feast, and Jesus sat to eat with him at his house. Many publicans and sinners followed him and came to dine with Him and His disciples. The scribes and Pharisees were watching this scene play out, and said, “How is it that He eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?”

Jesus replied by saying, “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.”

You can read about all of this in Matthew 9:9-13, Mark 2:13-17, and Luke 5:27-32.

[One of the young men in the church asked me, “why are publicans singled out? And what’s the difference between a publican and a sinner?” A publican was a tax collector. At the time in Judea and Galilee, the publicans were generally Jews who had been employed by the Roman government to gather taxes from their own countrymen. They were known for being greedy cheats, liars and extortioners, who would frequently overcharge and then pocket the difference, or make up false charges of smuggling and then extort hush money. And practically, their victims had no remedy. This is why John the Baptist, when some publicans showed up to be baptized, said, “Exact no more than that which is appointed you” (Luke 3:13). They were also considered by their countrymen to be traitors and apostates. They were roundly despised by all of society, and in most cases, rightly so because of their vicious greed. So, due to the facts on the ground at that time, they were singled out as a separate group of sinners. When we see “publicans and sinners” it can be thought of as something like “publicans and all other sorts of notorious sinners.”]

In these passages, Jesus explains why He was eating and drinking with these publicans and sinners. Why He was “hanging out” with these sinners. He wasn’t there to party with them, as so many perverse people in this world have falsely accused Him of. He wasn’t there to partake

in their sins. He was there as their physician. He was there to heal their disease, particularly the disease of sin. He knows exactly what his sick patients need, precisely when they need it, and His cure is unfrustrable. He was there not to heal those who are “whole” (that is, those who think that they are whole, but do not realize or admit that they are sick). No! He was there to heal the sick (that is, those who understand themselves to be so). He was there in mercy. He was there to call sinners to repentance (that is, those who admit that they are sinners and are ashamed of it). He was not there to call the righteous (that is, those who are righteous in their own eyes and don’t even believe and/or care that they are sinning).

Elsewhere, Jesus taught that those who thought that they were enlightened, even while remaining in sinful disbelief, would have their sins remaining (John 9:39-41), and that it is the humble sinner who is justified, not the one who thinks he’s righteous (Luke 18:9-14). People like to say that this self-righteousness is restricted to religious hypocrites. Although it certainly includes that, it is not limited to that. We have a whole “generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness” (Proverbs 30:12). Remember, we’re dealing with people in this generation who not only refuse to repent, but refuse to even acknowledge that their sin is sin. And most of those who do admit that they are sinning are fools who “make a mock at sin.” (Proverbs 14:9). Jesus Christ did not “hang out” with these types of sinners. He came to call those who labor and are heavy laden (that is, those who are burdened by their sins) – not everyone (Matthew 11:28-30).

These publicans and sinners that He was dining with in this story were humble sinners. Sinners who knew that they were sinners, and were burdened and ashamed by it. Sinners that were looking for help from the Great Physician. And this is why they “followed Him” (Mark 2:15). And what they got from Christ was a call to repentance.

The Woman Anointing Jesus

The woman who anointed the feet of Jesus is one of the most touching scenes of a truly penitent person. Here we have a woman who had committed great sins against God, and here she is in tears, at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ in faith, knowing that He is her only hope. The repentance part is lost on the callous perverts that we live among (just like it was lost on the Pharisee that Jesus was dining with) – the only message they get from this event is, “Jesus hung out with prostitutes” as if He was complicit in the sin. Also, please note, Jesus didn’t only eat with people who were notorious sinners – here He is eating with a Pharisee, one of the people who “appear beautiful outward (i.e., without sin), but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness.” (Matthew 23:27). He would get near to and preach to the whole spectrum of sinners, from those who claimed to be pure, to those who knew that they weren’t pure, though He spent most of His time with the latter.

Here is the story:

“And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that [Jesus] sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, And stood at his feet behind [him] weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe [them] with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed [them] with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw [it], he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman [this is] that toucheth him: for she is a sinner. And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that [he], to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped [them] with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, [the same] loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.” (Luke 7:36-50)

Eating With Publicans And Sinners

The Luke 15 account of Jesus receiving and eating with publicans and sinners also clearly tells us what types of sinners that Jesus commonly associated with. These are not impenitent and proud sinners – these are people who desired to hear Him. These were broken-hearted sinners who were penitent:

**“Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.”
(Luke 15:1-2)**

I’m not going to quote all of Jesus’s response here (which you can read for yourselves in Luke 15:3-32), but it contains three of His parables that we should all be familiar with. The parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost piece of silver, and the parable of the prodigal son.

The major theme of each of these parables is repentance. Again, Jesus was not eating with these sinners to engage in sinful revelry. They came to “hear him” preach repentance and faith in Him as their Messiah. Here are a few quotes from those parables:

“I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.” (Luke 15:7)

“Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.” (Luke 15:10)

“For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.” (Luke 15:24)

Abiding With Zacchaeus

Here is the story:

“And [Jesus] entered and passed through Jericho. And, behold, [there was] a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich. And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that [way]. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house. And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw [it], they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore [him] fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” (Luke 19:1-10)

Note that there is a press of people to the point that Zacchaeus has to climb a tree just to catch a glimpse of Him. Jesus looks past that sea of people and zeros in on Zacchaeus. This is divine election. What other than the everlasting love of God and His immutable decree of election would cause Him to cast His eye upon Zacchaeus? And this is the way that Christ has looked upon us, my friends. He seeks out and saves every one of His lost sheep.

Some things to note about this story:

1. Zacchaeus wasn't just a publican – he was the chief among the publicans. He was probably one of the most despised men in the whole city of Jericho, and had lied and stolen his way into being rich.

2. In the previous chapter (Luke 18), Jesus tells us that “it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God” and “The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.” Here we have an example of a rich man being saved by the power of God.
3. Zacchaeus appears to have gone out to see Jesus out of simple curiosity. This is one of the many ways that God can bring a person to repentance. It may start off as a mere curiosity, but it ends in salvation.
4. Jesus told him to “make haste.” When the Lord calls you, it’s a dangerous thing to linger.
5. Zacchaeus “received Him joyfully.” This isn’t just talking about him receiving Him to abide in his house (although he did do that). This is talking about also receiving Him into his heart, which is synonymous with believing in Him (as in Colossians 2:6-7).
6. Zacchaeus’s pronouncement of giving half of his goods to the poor, and restoring anything fourfold that he had taken by false accusation, is the fruit of his repentance. At this moment, he is convicted of his sins, and knows that he had been a fraudulent, lying extortioner and thief, and is now testifying that he has a sense of his sins, and is repenting for them.
7. When Jesus says that salvation is come to his house because he is a son of Abraham, it does not mean that Jesus is saving him because he’s a descendent of Abraham. It means that He’s saving him because he is one of the elect of God. We see this in Romans 9:8 – “They which are the children of the flesh, these *are* not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.”
8. Once again, the people look right past the marvelous work of God in calling a sinner to repentance and say, “Jesus is hanging out with a sinner!”

The Samaritan Woman At The Well

A similar story where Jesus calls one of His elect who was currently living in great sin is the woman at the well. It’s too long to quote here, but you can read about it in John 4. In divine providence, Jesus was resting at the well that a Samaritan woman was coming to draw water from. There were a lot of women in Samaria, but this is the one chosen by Christ to reveal Himself to. They converse about the “living water,” but she doesn’t have any idea what He’s talking about, and speaks to Him in a scoffing, jeering manner. Gill suggests that she speaks to him in this manner right up until the time that He lays her sin bare:

“Thou hast well said, I have no husband: For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly.” (John 4:17-18)

And then she suddenly becomes serious, as people often become when they are convinced of their sin. Christ reveals to her that He is the Messiah, and she goes back into the city and tells everyone that she can get her hands on that the Messiah is there, and many of those Samaritans also ended up believing.

There's a lot to be said about this story, but I'm going to limit it to pointing out, once again, that Jesus preached against sin. He didn't coddle this woman in her sin and tell her it was good. He very clearly and plainly exposed her sin. And I would also point out that in different instances, Jesus preached against sin in different ways. In this case, He dealt with this woman very mildly, simply stating the facts. In other cases, He upbraided people for their sins (not only impenitent sinners, but even His own disciples). We can learn that different people and different situations may require a different spirit of preaching.

The Woman Taken In Adultery

The story of the woman taken in adultery ranks up near the top of the list of Bible passages that are most abused (along with John 3:16, Matthew 5:43, Matthew 7:1, etc.). The story is in John 8, and the message that simpletons take from it is, "you're never supposed to preach to anyone" and "you're never supposed to tell anyone that they're doing anything wrong." Here's the story:

"And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them. And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with [his] finger wrote on the ground, [as though he heard them not]. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard [it], being convicted by [their own] conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, [even] unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more." (John 8:2-11)

It is notable what Jesus did NOT say in this story. He did NOT tell her that her sin was OK. He did NOT tell her that she didn't deserve to be stoned according to the law of Moses. What He did tell her was to stop sinning: "Go, and sin no more."

Remember, what the scribes and Pharisees were doing here was trying to tempt the Lord Jesus. They didn't care about the woman. They didn't care about the woman's husband, who was the victim of this crime. They didn't care about the law of Moses. They didn't care about living according to the standards of God. They cared about one thing, and that was trying to catch Christ in His words so they could find a way to get rid of Him. And they thought they had Him. If He answered and said that she needed to be stoned, then they could turn Him over to the Roman authorities, telling them that He was trying to play the part of a judicial magistrate and summarily handing down a sentence of death. But if He answered and said that she did not deserve to be stoned, then they could accuse Him of being light on sin and saying that adultery isn't that bad. They thought they had Him in a tight spot, so when He didn't immediately answer, they became like sharks with a drop of blood in the water.

But He answered them perfectly. He knew that every one of those men who had accused the woman of adultery were, in fact, practicing adulterers themselves. And He knew that when He exposed that fact, even they wouldn't have the gall to pursue trying to condemn the woman. When He says, "He that is without sin among you," the context requires us to limit it to the sin at hand (i.e., adultery). In other words, "Whichever one of you guys hasn't been committing adultery, you cast the first stone." Simpletons interpret this to mean, "if you've ever sinned, then you aren't allowed to ever tell anyone else that they're sinning." The real meaning is, "when you're in the middle of committing some monstrous sin, you don't get to accuse others of committing that sin." It's the same as we see in Romans 2:22 – "Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery?"

The other part of this verse that is frequently misinterpreted is the word "condemn." Again, the simpleton will take that word and run with it, saying that it means, "don't ever tell anyone that they're doing anything wrong." Or even worse, "Jesus is teaching that adultery is OK because He didn't condemn the woman." Taking that argument to its logical conclusion, people could claim (and have claimed) that Jesus is saying that we need to do away with the entire judicial system and let criminals run freely. What it's talking about in the passage is a judicial condemnation – that is, in this case, passing down a sentence of the death penalty. He said that she deserved to be stoned according to the Mosaic law – else, why would He have said, "Let him first cast a stone at her?" If she wasn't worthy of death, He wouldn't have told them to stone her - He would have said that she wasn't worthy of death. Also note that the men who brought the woman did not condemn her...they only accused her. They did not condemn her to death, and Jesus did not condemn her to death. It wasn't His job at the time. He wasn't there as a magistrate of the government (similar to another place where someone asked a question about dividing an inheritance, and He said, "Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?" Luke 12:14). He was there in the office of a Savior and Prophet and

Preacher. And as such, His final response to the situation is to preach repentance: “Go, and sin no more.” [Note that some people believe there is an additional meaning to Jesus saying “Neither do I condemn thee,” and that is that He knew the woman’s heart and she had repented of the sin, and He is therefore also speaking in an eternal, spiritual sense. As God, of course, that is His exclusive prerogative to put someone’s sin away.]

Miracles And Healings

The final thing regarding Christ’s earthly ministry that I’m going to talk about today is the multitude of miracles and healings that He performed. Dozens of these miracles are recorded in the four gospels. People like to suggest that Jesus went around healing people willy nilly just to show everyone what a nice guy He was, and that we are doing the opposite and should stop preaching the truth because that’s mean. So first off, why did He perform these miracles? He did it so that people would believe that He was the Messiah (John 4:48, John 10:25). To show that He was sent by God (John 5:36). To show His authority and power (Luke 4:36). To fulfill prophecy (Matthew 8:17). To show His compassion (Matthew 14:14). To aggravate their sin of unbelief and hatred of God (John 15:22,24). To confirm their faith (Matthew 9:22). To show that He has power to forgive sins (Matthew 9:6). So they would repent (Matthew 11:20-24). And I’m sure for a lot more reasons that I haven’t included here.

He did not heal everyone. He wasn’t under any obligation to heal everyone then. And He’s not under any obligation to save everyone today. There are times where He did heal everyone in a multitude (e.g., Luke 4:40 – “He laid His hands on every one of them, and healed them.”) There are times where He picked one person out of the crowd and healed that one person (e.g., the man at the pool of Bethesda – John 5). And there are times where He refused to heal anyone (e.g., in His hometown of Nazareth – see Luke 4).

When Jesus healed peoples’ afflictions, He didn’t just heal them – He preached along with it:

“The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached.” (Luke 7:22)

For example, when Jesus healed the centurion’s servant who was sick of the palsy (Matthew 8, Luke 7), He used it as an occasion to preach against the sin of the Jews and about hell.

When He miraculously fed the 5000, He didn’t just feed and heal them – He preached the kingdom of God to them (Mark 6:34, Luke 9:11), which necessarily includes preaching against sin. And after they were done eating, they followed Him, and He plainly told them that they were only following Him because they had gotten a free meal...not because they saw the

miracles and believed. He then proceeded to preach a sermon to them about the absolute sovereignty of God in the matter of salvation and election, and that He is the bread of life. After He was done, many of His disciples rejected Him (John 6).

When great multitudes followed Him in the coasts of Judaea, “He healed them there” (Matthew 19:1), and “as He was wont, He taught them.” (Mark 10:1).

Jesus, when He healed and when He preached, required repentance, belief, and faith. By definition, preaching repentance requires preaching against sin, because if there is no sin, there is nothing to repent of. In a large number of the healings that Jesus performed, He commended them for their faith, and required them to believe (e.g., Matthew 8:10, Matthew 9:2, 22, 28-29, Mark 5:36). When He healed the man at the pool of Bethesda (mentioned above), He sought the man out later and told him, “sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.” (John 5:14). In healing the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath, Jesus looked on the crowd in the synagogue “with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts” (Mark 3:5). He could not do many mighty works in Nazareth because of their unbelief (Matthew 13:58, Mark 6:5-6). And He upbraided Chorazin and Capernaum because they had not repented at the mighty works that were done there (Matthew 11:20-24).

Our duty

We have Christ as our example of how He interacted with sinners. He did not partake in their sins, but He did interact with them so He could preach to them. He required repentance and faith. And we should do the same. We don’t know who will and who won’t be saved, so we have an obligation to preach to every sinner, while simultaneously not becoming entangled and unequally yoked with them.

“I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.” (Romans 1:14)

“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you,” (2 Corinthians 6:17)

“I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world.” (1 Corinthians 5:9-10)

I love you. Amen.