

The Sinner's House

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[0 : 00] Well, now, so far for the past two Sundays, we've seen a couple of things I just want to draw our attention to by way of reminder. And the first was that of a tax collector in a tree after which Jesus went into that man's house, known as Zacchaeus.

Last week, we saw a paralytic on a rooftop. And he then is lowered down into someone else's house where Jesus actually heals that man.

I don't know if you remember this last week, but the person who led the prayers prayed that we might actually make holes in our life so that Jesus might actually get through.

I wonder how many holes you made in your life this past week for Jesus. I thought that was a great prayer. I've been working on that. Now, today, though, we see another tax collector who's in a booth and that Jesus then afterwards goes and enters into this man's house.

And so far, we've actually learned about the power of Jesus's teaching and his healing. We've seen the priority of Jesus to forgive sins. And today, we're going to learn about the presence of the Lord in our life that calls us to follow him as we repent.

[1 : 14] And so we've had this great theme that continues today and will for the next three weeks also, which is that the Son of Man came to seek and to save those who are lost. But every week, we've had a great verse.

And we have another great verse this week. And it's this one. Jesus stated, those who are well have no need for a physician. But those who are sick, I have come not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Now, Luke's the author of this gospel where we had this reading today. And he's like a doctor. He is a doctor of medicine, but he's also something of a spiritual doctor that's prescribing, I think, the friendship and presence of Jesus to sinners.

And it means the world of grace and mercy and generosity and hospitality to people. And in some cases, Jesus is met with great opposition and accusation.

To others, though, they meet him with great attraction and acceptance. So the title of this message is the house of repentance or house of repentant sinners.

[2 : 21] And the sign is a feast where he extends this kind of hospitality, this friendship, his presence to sinners. And let me tell you that this house can be our house as well.

And it's of greater value than any house on the market in Vancouver. Okay? I want you to believe that and know that. So there are two dimensions in this story to look at then.

The first one is this, a remarkable response. And the second one is a formal reaction. First, then, the remarkable response of repentance to the grace of God. Look with me at verse 27.

Your Bible is an open turn there now. But Luke narrates this. After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the tax booth.

And what did Jesus do? He looked the other way. No, that's not what he did. No. Jesus, the text says, that went out.

[3 : 20] He went out on this mission, as it were, seeking to save the lost. And so, Jesus, as he's doing that, doesn't look the other way, but goes for something of a lost cause. And in this case, it was a tax collector.

And tax collectors were like traitors or deniers or betrayers of Israel, and especially Levi. Get this. Levi, which probably came from the word Levites, were once temple tax collectors.

Now he's turned Roman tax collector. He was probably raised by a family that were God-fearing. But now he's turned something God-less.

And the only thing that he raises now are taxes. Levi probably once lost his faith. But it's possible that now he's actually regaining it.

Back in Luke 3, verse 12, we learn that John the Baptist was actually preaching a gospel of repentance through baptism. And there were many tax collectors that actually came out to John to be baptized.

[4 : 24] Who knows? Maybe Levi went there, or maybe he actually knew some other tax collectors that went and were baptized. Well, Jesus is gracious like no other. Because he notices, he looks, he saw those that we probably most ignore.

We gaze at the captivating and bold and beautiful. We look away from the bad apples. We look towards those like us. We look up to those above us.

We look down on those below us. But Jesus looks at and into the people who are especially lost. And his love has this kind of controlling gaze.

There's a German theologian, Helmut Thielke, who once said, The first commandment of love is eye control. Looking leads to loving. Or is it the other way around?

We look because we love. And that's Jesus going, looking, seeking, and showing his grace. And Jesus is even more gracious because he dares then to summons Levi.

[5 : 33] He says, follow me. And what does Levi do? He makes this remarkable response, doesn't he? Levi, starting in verse 28, he leaves, he rises, he follows, and then he hosts a great feast and a large company.

And this is a remarkable response and a great challenge to me, I think. Unlike Levi, I want all the information in making decisions, and the more the better, the longer the better.

But Levi makes this radical response based on little certainty and no real promise. But based on that, Levi then extends this all-inclusive evening for his friends and Jesus and Jesus' disciples, and probably even the Pharisees and scribes.

Levi provides the house. But the center of attention is Jesus. And Levi and all others then just want to be, be with Jesus. And this is Christianity.

I know there's more to Christianity than this, but it starts out with Christ wanting to be with us, the lost and then the lost wanting to be with Jesus. Jesus isn't hostile to the lost.

[6 : 47] He's hospitable to them. So Levi and his friends must have known, must explain why they were with him, because he was safe to be with. And this is a picture of Christian hospitality and friendship.

It is making a safe place for lost causes and those who've lost faith among others. And it means no pressure from Christians and no pressure on those who are not Christians.

It's just letting Jesus' grace and kindness and generosity work into the lives of other people so they might believe. So this is the remarkable response of Levi and his friends to Jesus, of repentance to the grace of God.

But not all respond the same way. Others have a formal reaction of rejection of the grace of God. The religious experts then show this quick opposition to Jesus, as quick as Levi's was to Jesus in terms of reception.

Look with me at verse 30. Luke narrates, I just want to notice two things here.

[8 : 06] The first one is this, that they grumbled at his disciples. In the healing of the paralytic, the religious experts just doubted in their hearts. Now they grumble out loud overtly.

Grumbling is the first sign of losing faith. Faith to the Pharisees is actually all about rules and control and privilege and assessment and evaluation and formality.

And if they had a tool, it was an iron to press things flat. If they had a logo, it would be a ruler to actually measure faith. They were no mess and all measure.

Everything tidy. Always definite. And never infinite. Well, the reaction is formal and one of open rejection of Jesus.

Like the Israelites who grumbled in the wilderness, the Pharisees are hostile to Jesus. Let me just say this, and I'll try to do it gently though, but if you think the church is in a kind of a wilderness or exile in our culture, we're at risk for grumbling just like the Pharisees.

[9 : 19] That's the first thing. The second thing. While the opposition is directed at the disciples, notice that it's actually all about Jesus.

They say, why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners? It's about what Jesus is doing and what he isn't doing. He's a friend of the wrong crowd, sinners.

He's not a friend of the right crowd, the righteous. It's not, well, he's not a friend of the, sorry, and I find that sometimes I'm just a little bit like, well, maybe a lot like the Pharisees and it's more than just an occupational hazard.

Jesus is just really gracious in his response to the Pharisees though, isn't he? No one would blame him if he kind of flew off in a rage at the Pharisees, but he's really merciful and true then in covering the disciples, the hosts, and the fellow guests that are in the house that night.

Jesus steps in, not defending the tax collectors, but declaring his purpose. Look at what Jesus says in verse 31.

[10 : 29] Those who are well have no need for a physician, but those who are sick need the physician. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

In other words, Jesus is saying this, what did you expect? In other words, imagine it like this. If I were a cardiologist, I'd set up a clinic with the screen addicted, not the Olympic athletes.

Or, if I were a palliative care doctor, I wouldn't turn up in the birthing center, but in hospice care. Jesus is saying, look, what did you expect?

And he's present, and he is with, and he is friends with tax collectors and sinners. Those who needed him the most, whose life critically depended on his saving work.

They are seized by sin, and he just wants them to be gripped by grace. And it's not that Jesus is against the righteous. He just wants to see people repent.

[11 : 34] That is a good thing, a joyful thing. In order for that to happen, he must be with those people, with us. Those who are headed in the opposite direction of the kingdom of God and of heaven, drawing them to him, drawing them to repentance.

So Jesus makes friends with the sinners and the lost for the purpose of this, repentance. That's why he feasts with these men, drawing people to repentance, which is a kind of a turn.

It's an about face. It's a U-turn towards Christ. It's not that it's just regret or remorse, but it's repentance, which is a reshaping, a renewing, a reforming of our life.

And not by our will, just by pulling up your bootstraps or by turning over a new leaf, but by responding to the word and the grace and the mercy of God. And so while some take this formal reaction of rejection of Jesus, the Pharisees, we have this other picture at the same time before of those responding to Jesus' grace with surrender and submission and repentance.

repentance. So how does Jesus do this today? He still brings his presence and his friendship into people's lives where they can find it.

[13 : 01] And that is actually through those of us who are his followers. That others might actually be amazed by his grace through our lives. Jesus wants to extend his friendship and his hospitality through you and me so that others might know his grace, his friendship, his kindness.

In this past year, we did a study of 2 Corinthians and we learned that Christians are actually the aroma of Christ. It's a very vivid image, isn't it? Let me just read to you from 2 Corinthians.

Paul wrote, For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To one, a fragrance from death to death. To the other, a fragrance from life to life.

Like Jesus, when we befriend those who have no faith or a lost faith, we extend the hospitality, the friendship, the kindness of Christ to them. And I know this isn't easy, is it?

But I want to say there's no pressure to do this. It's Jesus who's actually doing all the work. We're just creating or making the setting when we do that.

[14 : 12] We kind of stage an encounter, a genuine stage, not artificial, to sell Jesus like a house, but we do it genuinely. And this must suggest that we actually see a lot of life differently.

It changes our vision. We see our houses differently. We see the houses that we enter differently. We might even see our small groups differently. In our Bible studies.

In our workplaces. As we allow Jesus' friendship to impact us and through us to impact the lives of others. Because he's drawing us all actually as sinners into repentance that we might know as grace and kindness.

I speak to you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.
Amen.