

Who is Jesus for?

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, you say we are made in your image. You say we are people tainted by sin.

And yet in Christ, you say we are forgiven sinners and people being renewed in the image of our Creator. So may we as forgiven sinners rejoice and listen to your word today.

And if we do not know your forgiveness yet, I pray that this morning will be the day that we find that forgiveness. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Samantha is a fan of the pop star Taylor Swift. She's bought all her albums, she's been to her concert multiple times and of course she follows her on social media.

During the early months of the pandemic, Samantha lost her job as a waitress. She was worried, she wasn't sure how she was going to pay her rent so she posted about her woes on Tumblr.

[1 : 02] Then she got the shock of her life. Clicking on a notification one day, she discovered a private message from none other than Taylor Swift herself. I'm so sorry that things are tough for you right now and I would like to give you \$3,000 to help you out.

Could you give me your PayPal account? Samantha was in shock. She checked out the profile at least 15 times just to be sure that this wasn't fake and this really was Taylor Swift communicating with her.

It was a life-changing gift, Samantha said, helping her cover her expenses until she got a new job. In fact, Samantha wasn't the only fan Taylor Swift helped out.

There was another girl, Holly, who also got \$3,000 in similar circumstances. Along with the donation, Swift sent her an encouraging note, writing, Holly, you've always been there for me as a fan.

I want to be there for you right now. Hope this helps Taylor. It's great, isn't it, when you discover someone you admire is for you?

[2 : 19] It's flattering to know someone famous, someone powerful is looking out for you. But what if you're not a Taylor Swift fan? Would she still be there for you?

I have my doubts. But in today's passage, we're going to find something a little different. If you're just joining us, we're currently going through Luke 5-9 on Sundays, focusing on who Jesus is. And today, we're going to find out who is Jesus for. And one of the things we're going to see is that Jesus is not just for his fans.

Now, at this stage, he certainly has quite a few of those. He's been teaching and preaching around the place. He's performed quite a number of miracles. He certainly started building quite a reputation.

He has fans. But today, Jesus is going to show us he's here not just for fans, but for people whom you don't normally associate with someone like Jesus.

[3 : 25] Perhaps today, you think of yourself as falling into that category. There will be a number of you who will be thinking, me and Jesus?

No way. There is no way someone like him will be hanging out with someone like me. I'm too bad a person. I've done yucky stuff.

I am guilty. No way Jesus and I will be in the same room. On the other hand, there will be a number of you who will be thinking, Jesus?

Good guy. Happy to know that he works for some people. But not for me. No thanks. After all, I am not bad at all. I'm good.

Religion is a crutch for so many people. But I don't need that kind of crutch. Thank you very much. And perhaps there might be a number of you who are thinking, Oh, Jesus.

[4 : 25] Ew. What a goody two shoes. You know, these guys are, religious guys are always such killjoys against Blackpink concerts and so on.

They don't know how to have any fun. How is Jesus any different? And maybe my parents weren't like this, but actually, I want to be bad.

And it's the best way to enjoy life. Do what you like. Well, today, Jesus has a word for you.

Now, it's a short passage, only six verses, but there's quite a lot going on here. And what we'll do is simply dive into this little story and think about what Jesus is really doing.

So let's get going. And firstly, what we notice is that Jesus seeks out sinners. Jesus seeks out sinners. If you've been here the last two weeks, have you noticed who Jesus has been interacting with?

[5 : 28] Two weeks ago, we met Simon Peter. This is the guy, Jesus declares elsewhere, who is going to be the leader, the rock, the one whom the band of disciples is going to look up to.

But this guy is just a fisherman. He's not educated. He's not the guy who won the Bible trivia contest at the synagogue. And when he meets Jesus, he ends up saying, go away from me.

I am a sinful man. But Jesus says, don't be afraid. I want you on my team. You're going to be a part of my kingdom.

And then last week, we find Jesus interacting with a leper. Now, here's another guy whom society regards as humiliating, with everyone avoiding him because he's ritually unclean.

But Jesus isn't worried by all of that. Instead, he heals him, not just by speaking to him, but by touching him.

[6 : 39] What compassion. And he says, you're on team Jesus too. The priest can certify that. You are clean now. And then last week, we also get a paralytic.

You know, his friends bring him through the crowds, down the roof, and wait expectantly for Jesus to do his thing. And in front of everyone, Jesus says to the paralysed man, your sins are forgiven. What a claim. You're a sinner, Jesus says. That's actually your deepest problem, even more so than your paralysed state. But, you might be physically weak.

You might be spiritually deficient. But guess what? I want you in the kingdom too. I have the authority to do so. And let's make that clear to everybody.

I'll heal you. So we are getting an idea of Jesus' modus operandi. This is how Jesus has been working. Picking up the uneducated, the outsider, the weak.

[7 : 48] Jesus is for such people. So when we get to our passage today, it's natural to ask, who's next?

Well, let's find out. Verse 27. After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth.

And this is when we start shaking our heads and saying to Jesus, no, Jesus, no, no, no, no, no, no. Fisherman? A bit unexpected maybe, but hey, humble beginnings make for a nice story.

Lepers and paralytics? Yup, okay. Makes for variety at least. But a tax collector? Now you are going too far.

You see, if you are an Israelite, what is the first thing you think of the moment you encounter a tax collector? The first word that comes to mind is cheat.

[8 : 54] Such people will have entered a contract with Rome saying, okay, based on the number of goods entering this area, and based on the latest census, the estimated tax revenue from import duties, business license fees, that kind of thing, is going to be 10 million.

But, what if the census figures were massaged slightly? Or what if they didn't deliberately take into account the growing population in the area?

So, the HQ back in Rome expects 10 million dollars every year? But because the population is booming, the revenue earned in that area is actually 18 million dollars instead.

And guess where the extra 8 million goes to? No wonder even non-Christians back then said, all tax collectors are thieves.

they took more than they should buy right. But if cheat is one word, here's a second word that would have come to mind.

[10 : 08] Traitor. After all, what do these guys do? They are colluding with the Romans, they are collaborating with the enemy. Such people who sign up for such jobs must be the lowest possible life form.

they clearly don't care about others or only themselves. They are motivated by greed. Perhaps a modern parallel would be a Ukrainian who has deliberately signed up to support the forces of Vladimir Putin against his very own people because he knows he will get rich in the process. this isn't just a social outsider like a leper anymore or a helpless visitor like the paralytic. These are people without a conscience. Surely these people cannot be on team Jesus. And Jesus surely is aware of this. look at where this meeting takes place. It's not at Levi's home. It's not at the gym.

[11 : 25] It's at his workplace. It's at Levi's tax booth. In other words, when Jesus meets Levi, he is seeing him in action.

If they had met somewhere else, Levi could pretend and cover up what he's doing. But not here. there is no hiding his day job here.

Actively collecting taxes for the Romans. You could almost say that in verse 27, Jesus is catching a thief red handed.

And what does Jesus do? He could have said, you snake. He could have said, curse you. I mean, what would you have said?

What would you have proclaimed on social media? I can just imagine the comments now. Such low class people don't deserve to live. These frogs will be burned alive in hell.

[12 : 31] Maybe if you are outraged enough, you might even organize a mob to cancel these most toxic of people. After all, doesn't their toxic behavior harm the poor?

But Jesus simply says two words. Follow me. Follow me.

And in fact, if you look closely at verse 27, you would discover how intentional Jesus is. Notice who is the one taking the initiative.

Jesus is the one who went out. not the other way around. Jesus is the one who saw Levi. Not the other way around. And Jesus is the one who speaks first.

Not the other way around. There is nothing accidental about this. And we might ask, Jesus, what in the world are you doing?

[13 : 36] Don't you know that frogs bring nothing but trouble? people, if they switch sides, they're only doing so because of their own benefit. They will just poison everything.

But here is the scandal of the gospel. Jesus came to seek sinners. And not just the kind of sinners we think are kind of cool.

who? You know sometimes we like to hear testimonies don't we? Of people who were drug dealers or pop stars addicted to fame and alcohol and how Jesus turned them around.

They were sinners. Sure, but hey, at least they got a cool back story. But what if Jesus came to seek out the smelly guy in your workplace who always rubbed you the wrong way, making inappropriate comments, while never putting in his fair share of work, and who certainly has no cool back story?

What if Jesus came to seek out the bully in your school who never missed an opportunity to insult you and make your life miserable?

[14 : 56] What if you are a Christian today, but the Christ you follow loves the person you hate the most, on this planet? How would you feel?

And if you can feel the sharp edge of that, you can feel the sharp edge of the gospel. You see, we are hardwired to believe that good people get the good stuff and bad people get the bad stuff. But the gospel says it's bad people who get the good stuff. The scandal of the gospel is that God came to seek the godless.

In fact, he came to give himself to the godless. He goes to the least deserving, to people like Levi, to people whom you dislike, and he says to them, follow me.

I want you on team Jesus. This is who Jesus is for. No wonder the apostle Paul says that the message of the gospel sounds foolish.

[16 : 15] Can you feel that? But if today you are on team Jesus, this is your message. This is what you believe in.

Did you know that? For you know the gospel is God's very wisdom to shame the wise. Can you get on board with that?

Jesus expects you to. But now the story gets even more interesting because it now tells us, well, actually, there is one group of people whom Jesus has no time for.

And that's the second thing I want you to notice in this story. Jesus seeks out sinners, not the self-righteous. Not the self-righteous.

In verse 29, we are told that there's a party going on. Now, for us today, dinner parties are often private affairs, like whenever you see a sign outside a restaurant, sorry, we are closed for a private function.

[17 : 24] But during that time, they were very much public affairs. People could observe what's going on. And in verse 30, we're told that the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were certainly very aware of this particular party.

And they're not happy. What's the problem? They were not objecting to the feast. After all, later in Luke 7, we will find a Pharisee throwing a dinner party of his own.

But what they objected to was the guest list. You see, in the Bible, and even today, who you ate with is a pretty big deal.

To eat at the same table with someone is to say, I accept you, you have my heart, you're on the inside, not on the outside.

And now, they see Jesus eating with tax collectors who are cheats and traitors, don't forget that, as well as many of your associates.

[18 : 40] Perhaps put it this way, imagine that Jesus was around today physically with us, and you saw him going to parties hosted by known corrupt businessmen with ties to the local mafia, while staying distant from your local pastors association, who are the very people who are trying to uphold so-called Christian values.

How would you feel? Perhaps now you are getting a sense of what the Pharisees felt. So, what's going on?

what we need to understand is how the Pharisees fundamentally work. They work by exclusion.

After all, the very name Pharisee comes from the Hebrew word parus, which means the separated ones. They wanted to keep themselves pure.

And before we come down too hard on them, let's try to understand their point of view for a moment. You see, the Pharisees had a good memory. They knew from history that when their people behaved most like the world, that's when they got most into trouble.

[20 : 01] That's when they got God's judgment. So, they were keen to avoid that. They wanted to make sure people followed God. You could understand that, can't you?

That way, blessing would flow. If they live today, they would have certainly raged against pornography, transgenderism, paganism, and abortion.

I suspect many of us in this congregation would see them as natural allies. they were keen to put into place boundaries.

They were keen to keep certain people at arms length. And you know what? In one sense, they were almost right. When we look at the rest of the Bible, we find that the Bible does have a place for keeping certain people at arms length.

In Proverbs 13, verse 20, for instance, on the screen, we are told, Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm.

[21 : 11] Paul will say something similar in 1 Corinthians 15, verse 33, bad company corrupts good character. So the Bible does suggest there is a kind of person we should avoid, those who lead us astray.

And then elsewhere, scripture also tells us this. Next slide. Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.

In other words, scripture tells us not to mislabel what is clearly wrong and to pretend that something wrong is something right. The Bible is against that. But is that what Jesus is doing here?

Is he ignoring the proverb? Is he whitewashing the sin of the people? Well, no. And there are two things in the text that tell us that.

Firstly, look at how Luke describes this guest list in verse 29. They are tax collectors and others.

[22 : 21] But notice how the Pharisees framed their complaint. Verse 30. Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?

Do you see what's happening here? From their language, the Pharisees were framing things in an us-versus-them kind of way. These guests they imply are the true sinners, not us.

They're the lawbreakers, not us. They're the unclean people, not us. They're the ones unacceptable to God, not us. They're the bad guys. We're the good guys. So Jesus stopped being on the wrong side of history.

And then just look at how Jesus responds to them. That's the second thing, verses 31 and 32.

Jesus answered them, it is not the healthy who need a doctor, but those who are ill.

I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Here's the gist of Jesus' answer. I'm a doctor.

[23 : 33] I'm a doctor. And who are doctors for? Sick people. Imagine if I go to Dr.

Kenny when I'm sick and he says, oh, you're not well, you're at the wrong office, I only see healthy people. I mean, what kind of doctor is that?

Well, Jesus says, I'm a doctor, savior, so I go to the sick to cure them. I'm the savior, so I go to sinful people to save them.

Then notice how in verse 32, Jesus now uses the same terminology as the Pharisees. I have come to call sinners to repentance.

He uses the word they use, sinners. But he doesn't apply it in the same way they do. You see, remember how the Pharisees see themselves.

[24 : 42] We are law-abiding Jews, we are fine, we are healthy, we are not the sinners. But these are the people, they are the sick ones, they are the sinners.

And Jesus now turns the tables on them. he says, you know what, at least these guys know that they are sick, at least they know they need the doctor.

But you guys, you don't think you need the doctor, you think you are righteous. Well, alright, if that's what you think, then I've got no time for you. Because I'm here for those who think, who know that they need a doctor.

I'm here for those who know they are unrighteous. I'm here for those who know they need to repent.

I'm not here for people who think that they are righteous, who think that they don't need to repent.

And here is the greatest irony. At this point in the story, it is the Pharisees who actually need to repent. The most, they are sinfully arrogant.

[25 : 50] but they can't see it. They are blind to their own need. I like how the scholar, Greg Lanier, puts it.

He says that they are like people who stand bleeding outside the A and E department, mocking those who are going in for treatment. And Jesus has no time for such people.

He has come to call sinners, not the self-righteous. So here's the question for us today.

Do you know you are sick? Do you know that you and I are sick with sin, if I can put it that way?

Think of COVID-19.

One of the most interesting things about this virus is that it can manifest in so many different ways, can't it? Some people get fevers and chills, others get sore throat and diarrhea instead.

[26 : 56] Just this week, I learned a small number of people get what is called COVID toes, which means that their toes become swollen and discolored and blistered. And of course, some people have COVID but show almost no symptoms.

Well, that's what sin is like. It manifests itself in different ways in different people. for some it is pride, for others it is covetousness, for others it is actually quite well hidden.

After all, that's what the Pharisees show us, don't they? On the outside, they can appear righteous.

But that doesn't mean they are not sick. You can be someone who has very high morals, very high ideals, especially compared to the person down the road.

and yet you can still be a sinner because you disagree with how God does things. That's the shock.

And Jesus asks us, do you know you are sick? Some of us today might have experience dealing with those who have poor mental health.

[28 : 10] And you know that the worst part is when the patient has no insight. when they insist that there is nothing wrong with them, there's no need to see a doctor that they are completely well, even when they're clearly physically weak and deeply paranoid and constantly making bad decisions.

In a sense, that is what sin does to us. It damages our experience of life and directs us down the wrong paths. us. And as long as you refuse to acknowledge you are a sinner, Jesus cannot help you.

Because Jesus is for sinners and only for sinners. But here's the good news.

When we say, I'm sick, I can't help myself, I need a doctor, Jesus comes straight for you. He wants to be with you. Well, that's who Jesus is for.

He is for sinners. And to sinners, he says, follow me. Because at the end of the day, that's what repentance means, following Jesus.

[29 : 26] It's when like Peter, we say, Lord, I'm a sinful man. It's when like the leper, we say, if you are willing, you can make me clean.

It's when like the paralytic, we receive his forgiveness of sin. And like Levi, it's when we get up, leave everything and follow Jesus, which of course is what Peter and his companions do earlier as well.

That's what repentance is. Repentance is not your good intention to attend church faithfully.

Repentance is not you giving 10% of your salary to the church.

Repentance is not even you coming to the front when there's an altar call. Nothing wrong with any of those things. But true repentance is when you say, I am a sinner, Lord, forgive me, I leave everything to follow you.

Just this week, I learned of a little village in Antarctica called Vias Las Estrellas. Now to live there, you must meet one condition. You must remove your appendix.

[30 : 38] Why? Because the nearest hospital is more than a thousand kilometers away and you'll be in big trouble if your appendix bursts. So to become resident there, you literally leave a piece of yourself behind.

Well, when we become a resident of the kingdom of God, it's even more radical than that. We have to leave not just a piece, but our entire old selves behind.

That's what Jesus is calling you and I to do. That's what Levi did. He left his pension, he left his government protection, and in case you didn't realize, Levi is actually Matthew who wrote the very first book of our New Testament.

this man was radically transformed. But there is one more thing I want us to see from this story.

And here's the third thing. Jesus seeks out sinners, not the self-righteous, because he wants us to enjoy his banquet.

[31 : 52] You know, when I said the word repentance a couple of minutes ago, I wonder what image popped into your head. Set cloth and ashes, funeral rites, the monastery.

But let's look again at this story. You see, Jesus tells Levi, follow me. And what kind of person will Levi be following?

Well, if you read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, you could very well conclude that Levi must be following a Malaysian. Why?

Because Jesus is always eating and drinking. He eats at a wedding feast in Cana. After today's story, he eats grain from the grain fields with the disciples on the Sabbath.

He will eat later at various Pharisees' houses, more than once. He eats at Lazarus' house. He eats at Zacchaeus' house. In fact, what does he do before he goes to the cross? He shares a meal with his disciples.

[32 : 56] What does he do after he rises again? He goes for a makan with the two men that he met on the road to Emmaus. He has breakfast with Peter and the other fishermen on the shore.

Jesus clearly enjoys a good meal. Because Jesus says, that's what I want to do for all eternity. I want to eat with you.

I want to feast with you. That's the whole point of the Lord's Supper which we just took earlier. It's a tiny preview of what we're going to enjoy in the future. That's how the new heavens and the new earth are sometimes depicted as a great wedding feast.

Here in today's story, right after Jesus says, follow me, the next scene we get is of Jesus eating with sinners at a great banquet.

Because in the end, that is what repentance will bring. You see, it is right to associate repentance with mourning over sin.

[34 : 02] That's what the Old Testament does. But it is also right to associate repentance with joyful celebration. That's what Luke 5, verse 27 to 22 does.

And what Luke chapter 15 later on will also do. After all, when you are sick, but a doctor who can heal you has come, well surely you would celebrate within you.

So my friends, let's not be afraid to turn to Jesus. Sometimes we are afraid, aren't we?

There's a story of someone who was once driving home during a storm. as she drove, she started getting uncomfortable because she noticed a car trailing her. Suddenly her tire blew and as she pulled over so did the other car. And straight away a man jumped out from behind the wheel and changed her tire without hesitation.

[35 : 06] I was going to turn off this road about three kilometers ago, he explained to her. But I saw your tire and I was worried it looked bad. so I made sure to follow you to make sure that you are okay.

And so often, when we first meet Jesus, we feel like this woman did at first. We are uncomfortable. We're worried that Jesus is out to get us. When actually the truth is, Jesus is here to save us. He wants us to turn to him to heal us. to God So let me end by saying this. Remember the three groups of people I mentioned at the beginning of this sermon?

Well, this is what God is saying to you today. If you say, I'm too bad, then don't forget that's exactly the kind of people Jesus is looking for.

He wants those who know they are sick. And if that's you, he wants you to know there is a remedy available. So don't push him away.

[36 : 12] He won't push you away. Repent. That means come to him. Follow him. If you say, I'm not bad at all, then don't forget you are sick too.

You might not show obvious symptoms. You might think that you're better than the majority of the people around you. But Jesus says the sin virus is still inside of you. And it might not kill you today, but it will kill you eventually.

So don't make light of it. Repent. That means come to him. Follow him. And if you say, I want to be bad, then don't forget real joy is only found in Jesus.

You can eat, drink, and be married elsewhere outside of Jesus. and sure it will be fun sometimes. But if your joy is rooted only in the good times of life, it is not going to last.

What happens when the bad times come? But if your joy is rooted in Jesus, well, Jesus is never going to go away.

[37 : 27] So repent. That means come to him, follow him. And finally, if you are a Christian today, that's just one last thing to say.

As you enjoy this feast, did you know you can invite others to this feast too? That's clearly what Levi did. He had tasted goodness and he wanted others to know this goodness too.

As one scholar says, Levi now places all that he has in the service of Jesus' mission. his riches, once used for himself, is now used for Jesus' sake.

Well, would you do that too? For this is who Jesus is for. He has come not to call the healthy, but the sick. He has not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

So let's invite as many people as possible to receive his invitation today. let's pray. Father, as we come here, we just pray, Lord, that we will not ignore the sharp edge of this passage.

[38 : 49] Father, if we are people who are self-righteous, if we are people who find ourselves in the same position as the Pharisees, will you help us not to remain blind, but to open our eyes to what's going on inside of us, and help us to come to you and turn to you.

But thank you that you are the doctor, thank you you are the one who always comes for the sick.

Thank you that you come for sinners like us. And Father, help us to know the joy that as we come to you, we find true forgiveness, we can find true joy, we can find true celebration, a celebration that will go on forever.

So help us to remember that and help us, like Levi, to get up, leave everything, and follow you. We pray all this in the name of Jesus.

Amen.