

Weaving the Word

Winner Winner Sinner Dinner

April 9, 2017

Welcome to where we're diagnosing the deceptions that blind us to the truth.

Are you the friend of the Friend of Sinners?

I know He's *your* friend; but, are *you* *His* friend? **We can focus so much on serving and submitting that we lose sight of growing in being His friend.** It's a balance, for sure.

I trust that you're His friend; but, **how good a friend are you?** Well, *let's find out!*



Last week we saw, by weaving the Gospels, that **Matthew was one of The Twelve and collecting taxes in his off-hours**, when Jesus left His gathering of Pharisees, to deploy Matthew.

Then Levi [a.k.a. Matthew] held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, a large crowd of many tax collectors and "sinners" and others were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. – Matthew 9:10; Mark 2:15; Luke 5:29 NIV



Like who? Remember the Centurion, whose servant Jesus healed? *He* lived in Capernaum. (Luke 7:1-4)



Ever wonder why a Roman commander and his troop were stationed in a fishing village?

It sat along a major trade route (*the Via Maris*); today called the International Coastal Hwy.



The Centurion and his men ran a customs agency nearby, charging import and export fees, use tolls, and various taxes.

Guess where Matthew worked. That's his *boss!* And, the people at the party are his co-workers and the riff-raff they hung out with.



Now, earlier in the day, hundreds of Pharisees and teachers of the law (from every town in Galilee and Judea), were crammed into Jesus' house; and, after doing all He could to open the Word to them, they still rejected Him. (Luke 5:17-18)

But **When the Pharisees** and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect **saw this**, saw him eating with the “sinners” and tax collectors, **they** complained to his disciples, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and ‘sinners?’” – **Matthew 9:11**; **Mark 2:16**; **Luke 5:29-31** NIV

“Well, they’re hungry and thirsty. And He really likes ‘em. And you don’t. So who will if He won’t?”

Are you the friend of the friends of the Friend of Sinners?

I’ve always enjoyed being around unbelievers. **I’m not threatened by their unbelief.** And, **I’m not offended when they act in ways I don’t approve of ... for myself.** I’m fascinated and curious.



In 1982, while going to college, I was in charge of Children’s Shoes at Bullock’s Department store in Sherman Oaks, CA.



A self-proclaimed “white witch” worked in the department beside me. I asked her about her witchcraft ... almost every day. At some point she began asking about my faith, which I shared as I would with a *friend*. I was only there three months. And, when I told her I was leaving, she said that I was one of her only *real* friends. And, she asked why I had to go. Now, just to be funny, I said, “The Lord told me my work here is done.” She started crying, and said, “I prayed for the first time, last night; and, I asked the Lord to give me whatever it is that you have.” Then, I cried.



If we’re the friend of the Friend of Sinners, we better be a friend of sinners too. Even when Judas *betrayed* Him, Jesus said: **“Friend, do what you came for.”** (Mat 26:50)

It’s incredible how **His friendship holds when we push away.**

So, how can we tell how good a friend *we are to Him*?

Well, He tells us how to tell. He says:

“You are my friends *if you do what I command.*” – John 15:14 NIV

Wait. What kind of a friend demands that?

It depends entirely on what the command is. **If the command is selfish, it’s a bad friend.** “*If you don’t loan me the money, you’re not a friend!*”

If the command is selfless, it’s a good friend. “*You need to go to the doctor right now. Get in the car, or you’re not my friend.*”

So, what’s *His* command?

My command is this: **Love each other as I have loved you.** [Leave it to Jesus to have the most selfless command ever conceived!] Greater love has no one than this, **that he lay down his life for his friends.** [What more could He possibly do to prove to you that He's your friend in spite of your sin? And, next He helps us to qualify *our* friendship to Him] **You are my friends if you do what I command.** [Which is? To love each other as I have loved you] I no longer call you servants, [Why?] because **a servant does not know his master's business.** Instead, I have called you friends, [Why?] for **everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.** – John 15:12-17 NIV

So, do you take the time to sit and listen to your Friend? And, how well do you know your Friend-and-Father's business? Because, *That's how good a friend you are ... to Him.*

They asked his disciples: “Why does he your teacher eat with tax collectors and ‘sinners’?” On hearing this, Jesus said to them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” to repentance.” – Matthew 9:12-13; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32 NIV

Know why He didn't come to call the righteous? *There aren't any!*

It's like a cattle driver saying, “I didn't come to round up unicorns!”

There are two camps: the sick who know it, and the sick who don't!

Our insecure side needs to hear that Jesus loves us sinners. Problem is, our complacent side goes, “**Cool! He's kind'a okay with my sin.**” The friend of sinners calls them to repentance. Sadly, most people think that repent means to shape up. But, to Matthew, a fellow rejected-and-despised Jew, it's an invitation to *join up!*

The Good Doctor loves His patients by hating what's killing 'em. Therefore, **the friend of sinners must be the sworn enemy of sin.** Especially the sins we work overtime to justify or ignore.

Jason Gray has twin sons. When they turned 18, he asked if I would write them some *advice for life.* Hmm. What do you say to 18-year-old men? Here's what I wrote:



I grew up in a junkyard of wrecked cars. One of my all-time favorite off-limits areas was the battery pile: a small mountain of heavy, black, car-batteries, tossed haphazardly into a caustic, toxic, acid-dripping heap ... *of fun!* [It was 1970 and nobody cared about the environment yet.] I loved climbing those unstable lead-acid blocks, popping off their brightly colored sulfuric acid caps, and pouring out the ‘fizzy water’, to watch it effervesce and listen to it hiss and pop. High times for an 8-year-old, on his own, in a wonderland of shattered glass and twisted scrap. Of course, my father had adamantly warned me to *never, ever, blah, blah, blah.* He said the water could burn me or blind me. *Yeah, right.*

Sometimes I'd press a steel wrench against the positive and negative poles until I found one that shot out sparks. What a charge! One evening, painful, intensely-burning sores broke out all over my legs. I immediately suspected an earlier rendezvous with the battery pile. So of course I said nothing, to nobody, and endured my ever-increasing anguish in secret. I felt betrayed. **The thing I pursued for pleasure paid me back with pain.** A few days later, out of the blue, my mom questioned how my legs were. "What do you mean?" I asked. She said, "You played in those batteries, didn't you?" I hemmed and hawed and finally asked, "Who told you?" "Your favorite jeans." She held up my softest Levis, fresh from the dryer, and destroyed with leprous white holes. *Curse you, battery pile.* You're on your own in a wonderland of shattered glass and twisted scrap. *Choose wisely.*

Why do we choose to sin? Because at the time, **we believe we'll be happier doing what's wrong.** That, of course, is a lie. It's not just any lie – it's a repackaging of the first recorded lie.

The enemy's tactic is always to question God's goodness. **"Here's this great gift," says Satan, "but God doesn't want you to have it. He's holding out on you."**

And, our response reveals who we really trust as our friend.

Sin isn't a random list of fun things God declares off limits. The Good Doctor says, *"This will destroy you, and those around you. I call it 'sin'. Choose wisely."*

We got'a stop seeing sin as something we get away with, and start seeing it as something we're saved from. Because, and here's a *big secret*: sin is *never something you get away with.*

Like Matthew and his friends at the banquet, ***it's gonna take its toll.***

So, choose wisely. **All sin is a declaration of distrust.** Sin is a profound statement that our Father isn't really our Friend; and, that we'll be better off by ignoring the Doctor.

So, when your Faithful Friend says *"That 'fizzy water' will burn you,"* don't wait for your jeans to prove His point while you silently suffer.

One of our problems is that **we can focus so much on changing our behavior, we lose sight of enjoying the banquet with Jesus.**

King David wrote in the Psalms, to ...

Taste and see that the Lord is good ... – Psalm 34:8a NIV

How good a friend are you? Enjoy the banquet.

There is no sin that leads to life. You *know* this. Question is: **do you trust it?**

That's what will decide whether or not your friendship will pass the acid test.