

# Admission to His Table is...!

Mark 2:13-17 & Matthew 9:9-13 (text)

## Reformed Church of Wainuiomata, 11 April 2021, 10:30, Lord's Supper

(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

### Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

This morning, we will come sit as guests at the Lord's table!

Question: Whom does our Lord welcome at His table?

Well, our text gives us a story – a true story that vividly illustrates whom Christ welcomes as guests at his table!

Our text allows for us the following three points...

- Christ's Heart towards His Table Guests
- My Heart towards Christ's Table Guests
- My Heart Attitude towards Christ

### Christ's Heart towards His Table Guests (v.9-10)

My brother & sister (boys & girls), guess what was Jesus' main mission/job on earth! Yes, guess what the main reason was why the Son of God came from heaven into the world of human beings!

Well, was it not to save sinners? Was it not to make sinners right with God?

I mean, is it not so that, already before Jesus was born, the Angel of the Lord told Joseph to call Mary's baby, "Jesus"?

Why "Jesus"?

Well, because "Jesus" means "He saves," and the angel said He (Jesus) would *save His people from their sins*?<sup>1</sup>

See?

See why Jesus, right at the start of His ministry said, "***Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near***"? <sup>2</sup>

Indeed, Jesus' main mission/job was/is to save sinners – to work change in their hearts so that they would receive God's only-begotten Son – His precious Son whom He gave to bear our sins at an enormous cost! – that they would receive Him in great faith as their Saviour & Lord!

So, one could say that, just as a doctor is in the business of healing people *physically*, Jesus was/is in the business of healing us *spiritually*!

And you know what? The Bible tells us that Jesus' *greatest business lies with the greatest sinners*! Yes, the *more dangerous the sick man's case is, the more reason for the doctor's help*!<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mt 1:21, "***She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.***"

<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Mt 4:17). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>3</sup> My adaptation of Matthew Henry's wonderful words: "Therefore his *greatest business* lies with the *greatest sinners*; the more dangerous the sick man's case is, the more occasion there is for the physician's help" (Henry, M. (1994). [Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume](#) (p. 1655). Peabody: Hendrickson).

See why the Apostle Paul once said that Christ came into the world to save sinners, but especially the *worst* of sinners!?<sup>4</sup>

Well, look! Jesus' calling of Matthew is a case in point...

I mean, what a shocking thing it was! After all, was Matthew not a *tax collector*!? And were not tax collectors the most despised people in the community?

I mean, Jewish tax collectors were regarded as collaborators with the enemy! So, *even though tax collectors were rich, their social status was at the bottom of the barrel!*<sup>5</sup>

Yes, tax collectors were so despised that they were not permitted to participate in the synagogue worship services!

See? See how their fellow countrymen went so far as to restrict a tax collector's access to God!?

Also, tax collectors were regarded as so disreputable that they were not permitted to give testimony in the law courts of that day!

And so, the phrase "tax collectors and sinners" became a label for the dregs of society; for the scum of the earth!

Yet, Rabbi Jesus came and did the unthinkable – He called this tax collector and said to him as much as, "Matthew (Levi), I want you to be My student! I want you to come after Me, and I'm going to teach you, train you, and prepare you for a spiritual mission. In order to do that, Matthew, you have to leave your current occupation. You have to forsake all of the wonderful income that comes with being a tax collector, and come and join my band of disciples!"<sup>6</sup>

And Jesus' calling of this despised tax collector was powerful and effectual! Matthew did leave his tax booth – never again to return to it!

You see, when Jesus called Peter and Andrew and James and John, they were fishermen! They knew that if things didn't work out with Jesus, they could go back to the Sea of Galilee and take up their old fishing trade! But Matthew did not have such a safety net!

Once Matthew left his tax-collecting job, there would be many men waiting to take that position!

But Jesus had effectively won the heart of this despised sinner!

And Luke's Gospel tells us that Matthew left *everything*<sup>7</sup> for Jesus' sake.

Now, at Matthew's home, he is hosting Jesus!

It may even be that one of the reasons for this meal was Matthew's farewell *out of taxation!*

And so, Matthew had invited all his mates!

And we don't know how far these mates were with receiving Jesus as Lord & Saviour, but some might already have started to open up for Jesus.

You see, Mark tells us (in Mk 2:15) that ***While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed*** (were starting to follow?)<sup>8</sup> ***him***.

And Jesus was even *at table* with all these tax collectors – the scum of society?

---

<sup>4</sup> 1 Tim 1:15, ***Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.***

<sup>5</sup> My adaptation of the words of Sproul, R.C. 2013. St. Andrew's Expository Commentary – Matthew. Wheaton, Ill : Crossway. ISBN: 978-1-4335-3175-0 p.272.

<sup>6</sup> My adaptation of Sproul (ibid:271).

<sup>7</sup> Lk 5:28 καὶ καταλιπὼν πάντα ἀναστὰς ἠκολούθει αὐτῷ.

<sup>8</sup> NIV reads "followed" – simple past tense. But the Greek has ἠκολούθουν an imperfect active indicative 3 pl of ἀκολουθέω, which means it could be an *ingressive* action, i.e. "starting to follow"

My brother & sister, we should remember that in ancient Palestine, sharing a table was an expression of deep intimacy.

So, why would Jesus, *rabbi* that He was, involve Himself so closely with sinners?

Well, is Jesus not a Healer – in fact, THE Healer of hearts & lives?

And is Jesus the Healer – yes, Jesus the Doctor – not doing what a doctor does, i.e., getting His hands dirty!?

I mean, is it not so that diseases are dirty – even spiritual diseases? And is it not also true that the *treatment* of diseases is a dirty business?<sup>9</sup>

My brother & sister, did I not see that again last Friday when I took our daughter-in-law (Xiaocun)<sup>10</sup> and little seven-month-old Pieter to the doctor!?! You see, both Xiaocun and Pieter had a virus. And we all know how contagious viruses are! Yet, the doctor came close up to them, touched their heads, looked into their mouths and ears, listened to their lungs & hearts. And, seeing that we live in pandemic times, the doctor even took a swap from Xiaocun – not that he expected that she had COVID 19, but just to “tick all the boxes!” The doctor even touched objects which they had touched!

See why we say that disease and the treatment of it is a dirty business!?

Yet, was this not exactly *that* which our Lord Jesus did?

I mean, did He not go to where the physical and spiritual filth was? Did He not touch lepers, free those possessed by demons, comfort those who were downcast and... eat with those who were socially unclean, i.e., tax collectors & sinners? Did He not even call one of them, Matthew, to become His disciple/student/follower?

See how our Lord put Himself at great risk – a risk which would eventually cost Him His life?

Why did Jesus do that?

The answer lies in the most important word in our text, i.e., “compassion!”

Yes, verse 13 mentions it: “Compassion!”

Did you know that in the Greek & Hebrew words for “compassion” actually sit three qualities: compassion, grace & self-sacrificial love?<sup>11</sup>

I love what one commentator says: “That Jesus worked the conversion of sinners’ souls – yes, even the soul of a despised tax collector – is that not the greatest act of compassion imaginable!?” “I mean, it is saving a soul from death!”<sup>12</sup>

See why this long point 1 of the sermon is called: **Christ’s Heart towards His Table Guests?**

Question: Do you & I share this compassion (this grace & self-sacrificial love) of our Lord Jesus towards sinners?

Well, that brings us to point 2...

### **My Heart towards Christ’s Table Guests (v.11-13)**

My brother & sister, what happens now in our text?

---

<sup>9</sup> My adaptation of the words of Sproul, R.C. 2013. St. Andrew’s Expository Commentary – Matthew. Wheaton, Ill : Crossway. ISBN: 978-1-4335-3175-0 p.273.

<sup>10</sup> Pronounced as “Shout-Soon”

<sup>11</sup> Also the Hebrew word of Hosea 6:6 (the word, *hesed* [חֶסֶד]) rendered by the Greek word, *eleos* (ἔλεος) of our text.

<sup>12</sup> My rewording of the well-said words of Matthew Henry: “Christ’s conversing with sinners is here called mercy: to promote the conversion of souls is the greatest act of mercy imaginable; it is *saving a soul from death*, Jam. 5:20” (Henry, *ibid*).

Well, we see that this scene into which heaven's compassion, grace & self-sacrificial love has descended – this most beautiful scene gets interrupted!

You see, the elite of society – those who enjoyed the admiration of the people – yes, the proud religious leaders who self-confidently reckoned that *they* were among the very few who were right with God – yes, *they* now come and, with their “ticking-all-the boxes” approach, now show the true colour of their hearts – hubris & judgementalism!

But they don't come directly to Rabbi Jesus! No, like cowards, they sneakily approach Rabbi Jesus' disciples, asking as much as, “Why does your Teacher associate Himself so closely with sinners – yes, with write-offs, with those of whom we're convinced that they're in God's bad books!?”

Well, Jesus must have overheard their conversation, so He answers – and His answer is brilliant (v.12): “**It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick.**”

By this, our Lord was saying as much as:

*“You don't like the people gathered around Me?*

*Well, these are the people I came to redeem.*

*These are the people I came to call to repentance.*

*I'm not involved with sinners because I want to be amid sin.*

*No, I'm here because I care about them, because they're lost and they're dying, and I've come to be their Saviour!”<sup>13</sup>*

My brother & sister, what is your & my heart-attitude to those whom our Lord has chosen to closely associate Himself with? How do we judge those who sit at the Lord's table?

Granted, our elders do have the task to supervise the Lord's table! And, yes, in doing that, the elders do look for the fruits of the Holy Spirit in those who come to sit at the Lord's table – after all, our Lord did say that you will know a tree by its fruit!<sup>14</sup>

However, let us also remember the words of 1 Samuel 16:7, “... **The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.**”<sup>15</sup>

My brother & sister, you & I cannot see a person's heart!

And what is especially hard for us to gauge is a mentally impaired – or a mentally confused – person's heart; also the heart of the sinner who by our calculations is a write-off, yet a person whose heart the Lord Jesus might already have moved – yes, the person with whom Christ has already begun a new walk, and with whom Christ is busy, a person who to us looks like a gross sinner, yet a person who is so aware of the fact that he is a sinner, a sinner who, in childlike faith, has already for a while been craving to come sit at the Lord's table.

My brother & sister, there's one thing you & I should never do with such a person, i.e., to make God's Law stricter than He has made it!<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> My slight adaptation of the well-phrased words of Sproul (ibid:274)

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Mt 7:15-20, “**Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.** <sup>16</sup> **By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?** <sup>17</sup> **Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.** <sup>18</sup> **A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.** <sup>19</sup> **Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.** <sup>20</sup> **Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.**”

<sup>15</sup> 1 Sm 16:7 **But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”**

<sup>16</sup> Cf. M Henry (ibid), “Those duties, which are of moral and natural obligation, are to take place even of those divine laws which are positive and ritual, much more of those impositions of men, and traditions of the elders, which make God's law stricter than he has made it.”

And in this regard, I love how Jesus now answers those “tick-all-the-boxes” religious leaders: “...*go and learn what this means: ‘I desire compassion, and not sacrifice’...*” (v.13).

See? See again that most important word of our text – the word “compassion” – gracious, self-sacrificial compassion?

See how more than sacrifice – yes, more than mere outward forms of worship – our Lord wants our heartfelt worship, a worship which includes heartfelt compassion with sinners, and not laying upon them yokes which our Lord Himself would not!?

Well, here’s a question: How will you/I ever be able to show such gracious compassion to sinners?

Answer: only if/when you and I have tasted such gracious compassion from Jesus *ourselves!* After all, just like the person who has spent much time among the flowers in a flower garden now gives off the smell of flowers, so will the one who has dwelt (is dwelling) in the grace of the Lord, give off grace!

Perhaps someone may now ask, “But, pastor, how do I receive God’s grace?”

Well, that brings us to the last small point...

### **My Heart Attitude towards Christ (v.12-13)**

My brother & sister, how do you & I (how does anyone) receive the kind of gracious compassion which the tax collectors of our text received from Christ?

Well, only when we come before Him with a broken & contrite heart – just like the tax collector in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Lk 18:9-14). Remember that tax collector’s short but powerful & heartfelt prayer: “*God, have mercy on me, a sinner.*”<sup>17</sup>

You see, here is the kind of sick person (“patient”) whom Jesus will not heal of his sin/sickness: the one who will not even admit that he is sick; in need of Christ.

How ironic & tragic! Matthew and his fellow tax collectors who were sitting at table with Jesus – they who were not theologians – knew they were sinners! Yet, those who were supposed to know better, i.e., the scribes and Pharisees, they did not want to see that they needed to repent!

Are you & I like them?

You see, he/she who comes to the Lord’s table in cold compliance, by that very attitude says, “I don’t need the doctor!”

But Christ’s words of v. 13 say as much as this: Get rid of mere religiosity – cold-hearted compliance! It’s not enough to know the *letter* of Scripture – to have a head-knowledge! No, a heart-surrender is what is needed!

Yes, what God desires is a broken & contrite heart (Ps 51:17)!<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps you say, “But, pastor, I’m already right with God! Yes, already since my profession of faith or even before that – which means that Christ has already forgiven all my sins; not just my past sins, but also the sins I will, in human frailty, commit tomorrow and again and again! So, pastor, why should I then come again in broken heart to His table?”

Well, do you remember Jesus’ highly symbolic feet-washing act of John 13?

Do you remember that when Jesus washed the disciples’ feet, He was giving them a vivid illustration of how, on the next day on the cross, He would wash away their sins?

Do you remember how Peter, when he grasped that, said, “*Lord, do not just wash my feet, but wash my whole body!*”?

---

<sup>17</sup> [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Lk 18:13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>18</sup> Ps 51:17 *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

Do you remember Christ answer to Peter?

“Peter, *a person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean.*”<sup>19</sup>

In other words, “Peter, a person who has had total forgiveness of all his past sins, now only needs to humbly (and in awe) ask for (and receive) the forgiveness of newly committed sins!” My brother & sister, Jesus’ compassion was enough to not only have the tax collectors at His table, but also the Pharisees!

However, the Pharisees cut themselves off from table fellowship with the Lord, because they did not have what the tax collectors had – the heartfelt knowledge that they’re sinners in need of forgiveness!

Do you – do I – have this heart attitude?

You see, admission to His table is a broken & contrite heart!

If that’s your heart, then within ten minutes or so, come – yes, come in good conscience to the Lord’s table, for it’s such hearts that He welcomes!

AMEN (2,450 words excluding footnotes)

---

<sup>19</sup> [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Jn 13:10). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.