

Jesus – Friend of Sinners

By Henry Mahan

Bible Text: Matthew 11:19

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I'd like for you to turn back in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 11.

Charles Spurgeon once said, “Many a word spoken in ridicule has paid tribute, has paid tribute. And many times honor has been paid by the lips and tongues of hatred.”

In Matthew 11, verse 19, the enemies of our Lord, thinking that they brand with him shame, thinking that they would hold him up to ridicule, thinking that they would hand his name down to everlasting scorn called him a friend of sinners. In verse 19 the master said, “The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say with their lips of hatred, with their tongues of reproach and ridicule, and they say, ‘A gluttonous man, a wine bibber and a friend of sinners.’”

How short sighted were these religious leaders? How shorted they were. Their slander only published and proclaimed his blessed reputation. Their slander only brought him more glory for he is adored as the friend of sinners. They meant it to be slander. They meant it to be shame. They meant it to be reproach, but it proved to be his chief glory, the friend of sinners.

Paul rejoiced in that title. He said, “This is a true saying. This is a faithful saying and it is worthy of acceptance by all men that Jesus Christ came into this world to save sinners of whom I am the chief.”

The publican in the temple felt free to call on Christ, the friend of sinners, for he came and lifted not up even his eyes to heaven, but smote on his breast and cried, “God, be merciful to me the sinner.” And even the thief on the cross felt bold to call upon Christ to remember him. He said, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.”

“Out of my bondage my sorrow and night, Jesus I come. Into thy freedom, gladness and light, Jesus, I come. Out of my shameful failure and loss, Jesus, I come. Into the glorious gain of thy cross, Jesus, I come. Out of unrest and arrogant pride, into thy blessed will to abide, Jesus, I come. Out of my sickness into thy health and out of my want into thy wealth and out of myself to dwell in thy love and out of despair into raptures above and out of the depths of ruin untold into the peace of thy sheltering fold ever thy glorious face to behold, Jesus thou friend of sinners, I come.”

And they say a friend of sinners.

There is no sham gospel that our Lord gave us to preach. It is the good news that Jesus Christ is the friend of sinners. He gave us not a message of reward for mortals dressed in their fig leaf aprons of self righteousness. But he gave us good news to proclaim to sinners, sinners who have nothing, sinners who are nothing, sinners who know nothing.

Turn with me to the book of Luke. In chapter four our Lord Jesus Christ had been out preaching and he came back to his home town. The Scripture said he came back to Nazareth, the place where he was brought up. And he entered the temple on the sabbath day and he stood up to read. And our Lord selected this passage from Isaiah 61 to describe his ministry. Our Lord used this passage from Isaiah 61 to describe his task, his mission. He said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he hath anointed me," verse 18, "to preach the gospel to the poor."

Now, brethren, that's not the poor in this world's goods, because many a poor man is a proud man. But as Arthur Pink said, "This is the spiritually poor, the man who is nothing, has nothing and knows nothing."

"He has sent me to preach the gospel to the poor. He hath sent me to heal the broken hearted. He hath sent me to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind and to set at liberty them that are bruised."

Then in Matthew chapter nine our Lord again describes his ministry in Matthew the ninth chapter, verse 10. "And it came to pass as he sat at meat in the house, behold many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and with his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, when the religious leaders saw it, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your master eat with publicans and sinners? Why does your master associate with the lowest kind of people?'"

But when Jesus heard that he said, "They that be whole, they that be well do not need a physician. It is sick people that need doctors. Go ye and learn what that meaneth." This is his ministry. This is his mission. "You go learn what that means. I will have mercy and not sacrifice for I am not come to call the righteous, those who think themselves righteous and those who think themselves holy and those who think themselves acceptable. I am come to call sinners to repentance."

The name that they gave him which they felt was a name of shame, was a name of his very mission: Friend of sinners. The name that they gave him to reproach him and to bring ridicule to him was the name which portrayed his very glory, his very mission: Jesus Christ, friend of sinners.

Now, brethren, I am not here tonight to prove our Lord's love for sinners. I am here to declare it. God did not send me into the world to prove the Lord's mercy to sinful men and women. He sent us to declare it. Our Lord needs no human lawyer. His words and

his actions are sufficient. I'd like to give you, this evening, six reasons why I believe that Jesus Christ is the friend of sinners.

First of all, he proves his friendship and he proves his love for sinners. I am talking about real sinners now. I'm talking about people who are guilty before the law, guilty in thought, guilty in nature, guilty in word, guilty in attitude, guilty in motive. He proved his love for sinners by his very incarnation. What better proof could he give than coming from the majesty of his Father's house to the humble manger of Bethlehem? He who was robed in the glory of God himself who shared the glory of the Father, he said, from the beginning left that glory and came into this world and lay in a manger surrounded by shepherds, horses, cows and poor people. What better proof could he give of his love for sinners than coming from the holy house of heaven to our miserable, wretched, dark, sinful world? What better proof of his love could he give than being made in the likeness of sinful flesh?

He wasn't made in sinful flesh, for he was the virgin born Son of God without sin. He had no earthly father. He did not partake of Adam's fall and of Adam's guilt and of man's sin. But he came down here and made himself in the likeness of sinful flesh, being born of a sinner, having a sinner for his reputed father, subjecting himself to trial and to thirst and to hunger and to—the Scripture says—every temptation and yet without sin. What better proof can our Lord give for his love for sinners, of his love for sinners than to be identified with a family of sinners, with a family of sinners?

Turn to Matthew chapter one. Here in the first chapter of Matthew we go back and trace the family tree of our Lord. Now, some time if you are in my study you will see on the wall of my study my family tree. I have an uncle down in Alabama who is very proud of our ancestors. And he checked and went through the family tree. I don't know where he got all his information, but he goes back to my great-great-great-grandfather. And I have the names of all of them on my family tree in the study on the wall.

Well, now, here is the Lord's family tree, the Lord Jesus Christ. It starts here in verse one of Matthew one. This is, "This book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David." Well, we start off right there.

David was the great-great-great-great-great-grandfather of our Lord and David was a sinner. Sure, he was a man after God's own heart, but none of us would want to lay claim to some of the deeds of David, would we? A man schooled in the art of adultery and murder. And yet he was in the family tree of our Lord.

You come on down to Abraham, "the son of Abraham. Abraham begat Isaac..." on down until you get here at the verse three and you read about a woman named Tamar and she was a great-great-great-great-grandmother of our Lord and she was a prostitute. She had twin sons by her father-in-law playing the part of the harlot.

You come on down you will find in verse five "And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab." Who was Rahab? She was the lady who had the house on the hill in Jericho where the

spies went and she, too, was a harlot. But she was a great-great-great-great-grandmother of our Lord.

And you come on down to verse six and you will find “Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of whom?” Bathsheba, the wife of Urias who engaged in an adulteress affair with David.

So, you see, our Lord Jesus Christ proves his love for sinners by his incarnation. He came down here from the holy house of heaven and identified himself with sinful men and women. His whole family tree was a family tree of sinners, men and women of faith, yes, men and women of trust, yes, in God, but men and women who were sinners.

Our Lord loved sinners. He came down here and identified himself with them. He made himself of no reputation, clothed himself in the likeness of sinful flesh. That proves his love.

Secondly, he proves his love for sinners not only by his incarnation, but he proves his love for sinners by his association. Now, you don't find the Savior standing at a distance issuing laws and commandments and statutes and orders to people. You don't find our Lord writing prescriptions and sending these prescriptions for healing to the people by the hands of his disciples. But you find our Lord coming right down among the defiled. You find our Lord coming right down among the sinful. You find our Lord sitting at the table with them. You find our Lord with his arms about them. You find our Lord eating with them. You find our Lord up to his neck in guilty, guilty men and women. He loved them. He loved them.

Our Lord sits at the Pharisees table. And he was so identified with sinners and so associated with sinners that a woman of the street was not afraid to come in and kneel at his feet and bathe them with tears and dry his feet with the hair of her head. You find our Lord sending his disciples on into town, into Samaria and he sits down on a well and here comes a young woman who had been married five times and at that time was living with a man who was not her husband. And our Lord Jesus, instead of being repelled, instead of pulling his coat up around him and lowering his eyes to the ground and sneaking away to keep from being seen with them, keep from being identified with them, keep from associating with her, sat on the well and asked her to give him a drink of water.

“Would you give me a drink of water please, ma'am?”

And she said, “How come you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan, for a drink of water? Don't you know that the Jews don't have anything to do with folks like me?”

And our Lord said, “If you knew who it is that is asking you for a drink of water, you would ask me and I would give you the water of life.”

Our Lord loves sinners. He calls to Zaccheus, Zaccheus who made his living cheating folks, Zacchaeus who sat down to figure out a man's tax and put in a 40% deal for

himself, Zacchaeus who preyed on the poor, Zaccheus who climbed up the tree out of curiosity to see the Lord. We find our Savior stopping under that tree and calling out, “Zacchaeus you come on down.”

And this shocked the religious people.

“I’m going to have lunch with you today, Zacchaeus.”

“Doesn’t he know who that is?”

He knows who it is very well. That’s the kind of folks he came to save. It’s in that very chapter that Christ said, “The Son of Man is come to seek and to save the lost.”

Our Lord didn’t come to call the preacher. Our Lord didn’t come to call the priest. Our Lord didn’t come to call the Pharisee. Our Lord didn’t come to call the righteous. He came to call sinners to repentance. Our Lord stoops by the woman taken in sin. The Pharisees were always out looking for somebody who had fallen, somebody to exercise their discipline upon. And finally they found one. And they brought her and Jesus Christ was standing there and they threw her on the ground and they said, “This woman was taken in the very act of adultery. Moses’ law says stone her. What do you say?”

And the Lord Jesus Christ stooped down beside that poor sinful woman and he began to write on the ground without saying a word. I don’t know what he wrote. Some people say that he wrote some names and places that these fellows would recognize. I wouldn’t know. That might be it. But I’m telling you this. The Scripture says beginning at the oldest, clear down to the youngest, they all strangely found somewhere else to go at that particular time. They found some unfinished business somewhere else. And when our Lord got through writing there on the sand, whatever he wrote, some names and some dates and some places and some sins and some guilt that had been committed in secret. This woman, yes, openly, this woman in public, but theirs in secret. He stood up and they were all gone. And he looked down at her and he said, “Woman, where are the men who were accusing you? Doth no man accuse you any more?”

She said, “No, Lord.”

But he said, “Neither do I. Go and sin no more.”

Our Lord erected his cross between two thieves and that’s where he died. And that’s where he redeemed this world and that’s where he came down and accomplished his Father’s task, between two thieves not on the altar of a church and not in a sacred holy place, but between two thieves. And then he made his grave, the Scripture said, with the wicked and with the rich.

Our Lord never preached so sweetly, our Lord never uttered words so kind than when he was speaking to a sinner, a sinner. And let me tell you he never spoke more sharply than when he was speaking and rebuking, speaking to and rebuking a self righteous man or

woman. Our Lord's words cut like a sword. Our Lord's pierced to the very marrow of the bone when he was talking to a religious hypocrite. But, oh, when he was talking to a sinner his words were sweet as honey. He was kind. He loved them. He proved his love not only by his incarnation, but by his association.

And then, thirdly, he proved his love for sinners by his sermons. Listen to him as he tells the story of the man who had a lost sheep. He said, "There ninety and nine in the fold and the man went there and there was one missing and the man left the ninety and nine in the fold and he went out on the hillside and he walked through the rain and the storm and the wind and the cold and he found his sheep and he picked it up and he put it on his shoulder. And rejoicing he bore it home and he cried out to his friends and neighbors, 'Rejoice with me. I found my sheep.'" And he said, "There is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner that repents."

He tells the story in his message about a woman who lost a coin and she swept the house and she got a light and she looked around and finally she found the coin and she put it with the rest of them and she called in her neighbors and said, "I found my coin that was lost. Rejoice with me."

And then he told the story about the lost son. And he said, "The boy came to himself down on the rail of the pig pen eating the husks and he said, 'How many servants I my father's house have plenty to eat and a good place to sleep and plenty to wear. I'm going home and I am going to say, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight and I am not worthy to be called thy son. Just make me a hired servant.'" And when the father saw him coming a long way off he ran with open arms and greeted him and he called his neighbors and friends and he said, 'Kill the fatted calf. My son was lost and now he is found.'"

And Christ said, "There is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner that comes to repentance." And then he stood on the mountain overlooking that city of Jerusalem and he said, "Oh, Jerusalem, how oft would I have gathered you unto myself as a hen doth gather her brood, but you would not. Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden. I will give you rest."

That last day of the feast he stood on Solomon's porch and watched the people going away from their religious ceremonies empty. And he said, "Everybody that is thirsty come to me. If you are thirsty, if you are weary, if you are heavy laden, if you are naked, if you are miserable and if you are poor, if you are blind, come to me and I will give you rest."

And then he proved his love, fourthly, by his prayers. He proved he loves sinners by his incarnation. He proved he loves sinners by his associations. He proved he loves sinners by his sermons. He proved he loves sinners by his prayers.

Turn to John 17. Our Lord went to the Father in prayer and do you know what he talked about? He talked about you and me. Aren't you glad he said, "Peter, I prayed for you, I prayed for you?"

The Lord took our polluted names on his holy lips. Our Lord is not ashamed to call us brethren. Our cause is his cause. Look at John 17. "These words spake Jesus," verse one, "lifted his eyes to heaven and said, 'Father.'" This is the Lord in prayer. "The hour has come. Glorify thy Son that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me."

Verse nine: "I pray for them. I pray for them."

Verse 15: "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world."

Verse 20: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word. I pray for them. I pray for them."

You know, my friend, you will testify to this, I think. If you really love somebody you will pray for them. And if you don't love them chances are you won't pray for them. Our Lord prayed for sinners and then in the fourth place he proved his love by his death.

"Having loved his own he loved them to the end." And the end was the horrible, terrible, suffering agony of Calvary's cross.

"Herein is love, not that we loved him, but he loved us and gave himself for us."

"He is numbered with the transgressors."

A man has committed a murder. He has killed a man. And then after he killed a man he took a knife and cut his throat and he falls bleeding and dying and someone calls the police and they and they also call a physician and the policeman and the physician are both on the scene quickly. The policeman comes in the interest of the law which has been broken. The physician comes in the interest of healing.

And the policeman says, "Man, you are my prisoner."

And the physician says, "My friend, you are my patient. Trust me."

And the physician kneels down beside the man and the policeman stands with the handcuffs in his hand and the gun in his hand and the warrant in his hand, but the physician kneels down with the tools of healing and lays his hand on the wound and he

sows it up and he gives blood and he gives medicine and he takes the man to his clinic and he puts him to bed and he pulls the white sheet up under his throat and day after day he goes to see him.

The law says, "He is a criminal. Leave him be."

The physician is not concerned with the man as a criminal. He is concerned with the man as a sufferer.

The law has come to condemn. Christ Jesus has come to save. He said, "The Son of Man is not come into the world to condemn the world. The world is already condemned. The Son of Man is come to save, to save."

Our Lord is the physician of souls. Our Lord is the one who stoops down beside the guilty and says, "Trust me. Trust me. I'll supply your need. I'll heal your wound. I'll make you well. I'll clothe your nakedness. I'll heal your blindness. I'll heal your lameness. I'll raise you up. Trust me. Trust me."

I heard the voice of Jesus say, "Come to me and rest. Lay down thy weary one, lay down thy head on my breast." I came to Jesus just as I was, weary and worn and said. And I found in him a resting place and he has made me so glad. I heard the voice of Jesus say, "Behold, I freely give the living water thirsty one, stoop down and drink and live." I came to Jesus and I drank of that life giving stream and my thirst was quenched and my soul was revived and now I live in him.

Our Lord proves his love by his prayers.

In the sixth place our Lord proves his love for sinners by his intercession. Turn to Romans chapter eight. What is he doing now? He proved his love by his death. What is he doing now? Where did he go? He went to the right hand of the heavenly Father. And Romans chapter eight, verse 34 says, "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even now at this moment, at this very time at the right hand of God and he is making intercession for whom? Sinners."

I'm glad I'm a sinner.

You say, "Preacher, that's a pretty bold statement."

It's not bold when you read chapter five of Romans. Look at it. Chapter five of Romans says this, verse six, "When we were without strength Christ died for the ungodly."

In verse eight, "God commended his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."

Verse 10: "When we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son."

I'm not glad I've sinned. But I'm glad I'm a sinner. I'm not glad I've broken God's law, but I'm glad I'm a sinner. I'm not glad I've offended his holy nature, but I'm glad I'm a sinner. I'm glad, one day, that God stripped me. I'm glad one day that God broke me. I'm glad one day God crippled me. I'm glad one day God smote me. I'm glad one day God brought me to the dust. And like Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus he unhorsed this proud sinner and broke his spirit and put him in the dust and left him one way to look and that is up. I'm glad.

You can boast of your righteousness and boast of your merit and boast of your works if you want to, but I boast of one thing, a Savior slain.

Suffer a sinner whose heart overflows, loving his Savior to tell what he knows. Once more to tell it would I embrace. I am a sinner saved by grace. Naught have I gotten but what I received. Grace hath bestowed it since I had believed. Boasting excluded. Pride I abase. I'm only a sinner saved by his grace.

I'm glad he loves sinners. If he didn't he wouldn't have loved me. And, Charlie, he wouldn't have loved you. And, H.B, he would never have met you.

If salvation were for good people none of you would be saved. If salvation were for good people none of you would stand a chance. But salvation is for sinners.

And then, last of all, turn to John 14. In the 14th chapter of John Christ proves his love for sinners not only because he died for them and not only because right now he is interceding for them, but he says in John chapter 14 he is coming back to get them.

He says in John 14 to his grieved, broken hearted, sorrowing disciples, "Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God. Believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions. And if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you I'll come again and I will receive you unto myself that where I am there you may be also."

Paul found great satisfaction in that. He said, "I am persuaded that to depart from this body is to be with Christ. And I am in a straight betwixt the two. I have a desire to depart and be with Christ which is far better. He is coming back. And he is coming back for me. And he loves sinners with an everlasting love, a love that will culminate in his eternal marriage to everyone of his own.

Oh, love that will not let me go. I rest my weary soul in thee. Oh, light that follows all my way. I yield my flickering torch to thee. Oh joy that speaks me through my pain. I cannot close my heart to thee. Oh cross that lifts up my head. I dare not ask to fly from thee. I lay in dust life's glory dead and from the ground their blossoms red, life that shall endless be.

Friend of sinners, that's what he is. They thought that they were bringing shame to him, but bless God they brought glory to him.

Sinners, friend of sinners, friend of publicans and sinners. They sought to ridicule him, but instead they praised him. They thought to reproach him, but instead they made him to be adored by every empty handed sinner in this world. Thank God for Christ. Thank God for Calvary. Thank God for his love and his grace.

Our Father, by the power of thy matchless Spirit, bless the message to the hearts of sinners. We have no good news for those who are free. We have no good news for those who are clothed in their own righteousness. We have no good news for those who feel satisfied in themselves. But, Father, if there is an empty handed, broken, naked sinner, if there is somebody out here tonight guilty who has broken God's law, who has wandered far away from God, give them the good news in their hearts, not just in their heads, but in the hearts that Christ died for sinners. And all they have to do is look. All they have to do is believe. All they have to do is cast themselves at the feet of Christ like the woman who was a sinner. And as tears of repentance fall from their eyes Christ will say, "Go in peace. Thy faith hath made thee whole." In his blessed name we pray. Amen.