

**Sermon Series: “10 Words from Jesus on Sharing the Faith”**

**“#5 Eat: Let’s Do Lunch!”**

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One of the most enjoyable times we embrace, especially those of us living in New Orleans, is times of eating together! Such times are also known as times of table fellowship. So, do you have any good memories of past times of table fellowship? E.g., I recall when my Dad retired my sisters and I threw a dinner together with him and my Mom and my Dad’s accounting partner and his wife. We went to my Dad’s favorite restaurant which happens to be a very out-of-the-way restaurant on the West Bank— Masca’s. The meal happened in 1998 or 1999, as I recall, and we had a great time together! I have a picture of me with my parents from that meal, a great memory. How about you? Would you think of a Thanksgiving meal, or Christmas meal, or birthday meal? There is something special about eating together and enjoyment of company, getting to know people over a good meal. This is true of us today, and it was true during Jesus’ time. And we can see that Jesus took advantage of this for the purposes of inviting people into not just a table fellowship, but an eternal fellowship— and He shows us how to do it.

READ Matthew 9:9-13 (p. 9)

**CONTEXT:** Jesus has just preached the Sermon on the Mount, and He healed a paralytic by forgiving his sins— which raised negative comments and questions from the religious leaders. What Jesus does next causes further concern from the religious leaders.

READ vv 9-10. “Jesus sought out the seemingly most offensive of sinners, even getting in ‘cosy relations’ with them, because He could see what many don’t see— such are often very close to the Kingdom. Cf. woman who was a sinner who bathed Jesus’ feet with her tears, Luke 7:36-50; Mary Magdalene, from whom seven demons were expelled, Luke 8:2; Zacchaeus the chief tax collector, Luke 19:1-10; Samaritan woman at the well with five ‘husbands’, John 4:1-42.” Jesus is walking along and sees Matthew a tax collector. We may notice that the synoptic parallels to this passage in Mark 2:13-17 and Luke 5:27-32 have the tax collector’s name here as Levi. Which is right? Or are we talking about two different people? It should be noted that in Mark 3:18 and Luke 6:15 it is Matthew’s name given in the list of the 12 disciples, not Levi. The best way to understand this situation is that Matthew and Levi are the same person— these passages in parallel are obviously the same situation in Jesus’ ministry of calling Matthew as a disciple. And other of the early followers of Jesus had double names— Simon/Cephas and Joseph/Barnabas (Acts 4:36). As we saw last week, tax collectors were not very popular among the common people— they were seen as treasonous for collaborating with the Romans and over-charging, and at times unclean in dealing with pagan currency. Jesus asks Matthew to follow Him, and he does! Jesus and he attend a meal together— it is not clear whether this is Jesus’ home (4:13), Peter’s home (8:14), or Matthew’s home— and Jesus is at table with other tax collectors and sinners. However, it is clear from Luke 5:29 that Jesus is eating at Levi’s/Matthew’s house. The footnote in our pew Bible

states that the original language more literally has that Jesus is reclining at the table, and that is what the word means. So if we picture this in our mind's eye, we can see Jesus is in cosy company with some notable people who were not following the Lord. This is part of the genius of Jesus— He is regularly doing stuff like this! We see Him with the woman who was a sinner who bathed His feet with her tears in thankfulness for His forgiveness, with Zacchaeus from last's week's message, with Mary Magdalene who was one of the first or the first to see Him resurrected, and the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus sees what we often miss, that those who seem furthest away from the Lord are actually quite close to coming to Him. E.g, I recall talking to someone who claimed to be an agnostic and in favor of abortion, and over the years of knowing him and he has slowly changed his position to being a firm God-believer and pro-life and attends church regularly. God is still working on him. E.g., also in my many years working with youth I have been surprised that those youth who often were the most rebellious were also, when you could settle them down to have a good one-on-one talk with them, were often the most open to the gospel. I recall one youth who smoked, got his girlfriend pregnant, and seemed little interested in the gospel, actually grew up to marry his pregnant girlfriend, go to college, get a Ph.D., and came to Christ! Why are those who are the most offensive of sinners often more open to the gospel than those who are ethical non-believers? My hunch is that they have tasted the rotten fruit of rebellion to the Lord and they realize it does not satisfy. Also, they realize they need a Savior— there is no need to convince them they are sinners! E.g., I recall Rev. Rob Renfroe told the story of someone he knew growing up who was a Christian and fell away as a young adult into other world religions and leaving Christianity; his friend eventually made his way back to Christianity and Rob asked him why, and his friend said simply in effect, "I knew I needed a Savior, and nothing I was seeking provided a Savior".

READ v 11. “Like those who saw Jesus staying with Zaccaheus (Luke 19:7), the religious leaders complained about a practice of Jesus which seemed commonplace for Him. Cf. 11:16-19.” Just as those who were the most offensive of sinners were attracted to Jesus, so Jesus was attracted to them. READ 11:16-19. E.g., I recall reading the book by David Wilkinson called, *The Cross and the Switchblade* where he in the 1950s hung out with the youth gangs of New York City, won their respect, and eventually led some of them to the Lord. We need to remember that Jesus did not hang out with them just simply to be their friend. He hung out with them to win them to the Lord. I.e., to bless them eternally with the One who loved them most. E.g., I recall the story of a Christian singer who was pulled over by the police who found a stash of pot in the car, and the Christian singer said it was not his, but from someone to whom he was ministering— and he seemed to be, from what I could tell, a sincere Christian, and I believe him. Are those who are the most offensive of sinners, those who are dirty, whose lifestyles seem the antithesis of the gospel seen by us through the love the Lord has for them?

READ vv 12-13. “Jesus’ response to His detractors is both simple and profound, and raises two questions. Who are the strong/well/righteous? In what way does Jesus show mercy and not sacrifice here? Cf. Psalm 51:16-17; Hosea 6:6; Matthew 8:11-12.” The strong/well/righteous here are the Pharisees who, ironically, are actually the ones most in need of a “spiritual doctor”. They are the ones who are self-satisfied with the outward show of righteousness. They are the ones who attend temple regularly, tithe their money as they should, and keep a kosher, ritualistically clean life. They did the right things, said the right things, sacrificed the right things, but their hearts were far from the Lord. READ Psalm 51:16-17 and Hosea 6:6. Unexpectedly, according to Jesus in Matthew 8:11-12 it is such who will be replaced in the great feast in the Kingdom by the gentiles!

Unfortunately, we can still easily fall into this trap of doing the outward things correctly but it having no effect on our hearts. E.g, I recall a man who got a call from his wife about her being in a car accident, and he inquired about how the car was, and in the course of the conversation he never asked her how she was, and from what I recall she was injured; from what I recall the marriage did not survive; the husband was going through the motions of the marriage, not in love with his wife. But I too can struggle here. E.g., I recall after having a quiet time getting up to start my day and no long afterward I was impatient with Elena about something and did not exhibit myself as someone who had just been on his knees with his Lord. So, in what way does the Lord show mercy and not sacrifice here? He reaches out to those far from the Lord with His sincere compassion; He actually spends time with them, the very ones who are ignored or insulted by the religious leaders. The sinners here did not earn Jesus' favor or deserve it; He gave it freely. E.g., I know of someone who often reaches out to the homeless in New Orleans and tries to feed them and talk with them and get them a job; every instance of reaching out to the homeless is a concrete, tangible expression of Jesus' mercy, Jesus' unmerited favor.

“With whom is the Lord calling you and me to do lunch this week for His Kingdom's purposes?” Table fellowship is a very effective way of bringing God's mercy into someone's life, and introducing that person to the gospel. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to whom He would have us reach out for table fellowship.