

“Dinner with Jesus”
Party at Matt’s
March 20, 2022

Good morning everyone. As Andrew said, we are continuing in our series, Dinner with Jesus. Our lead pastor began this series two weeks ago and it has been so helpful. If you are just joining us, have missed a week or want a refresh, as always I encourage you to go watch, listen or read the messages on our website, app or wherever you find your podcasts.

Back to today, some of you know me and you know I am NOT a country music fan. Sorry ya’ll but it’s just not my thing.

As our programming team was discussing what song might be a good set up for today’s message, I couldn’t get away from that song.

So much about it highlights the story we will be

looking at today. We will be looking at an account of Jesus having dinner with a bunch of tax collectors and sinners.

And as out of place as “I Got Friends in Low Places” is in a church service is how out of place the Pharisees felt Jesus was when they found him having dinner with “those” people. It didn’t fit. He didn’t belong there.

As Rick said earlier in this series, the Pharisees were a group of individuals who cared very deeply about the safety and future of their country.ⁱ

They believed that the reason the Roman Empire was occupying their land and oppressing their people was because the people had fallen away from obeying God’s Law given to Moses.

So, they were on a campaign to clean up the country so that God’s blessing would returnⁱⁱ

through the promised Messiah.

They wanted people to obey every religious law as a way to bring purity and holiness. But many were falling very short of the standard. They were lost causes.

And so the religious majority, expected the promised Messiah to destroy those lost causes and to punish and make them pay for their sins.

But that's not at all what we see Jesus doing. He hangs out with people in low places. He's regularly in the company of people who had been cast aside, who were without hope and full of shame and guilt.

And so it is with today's account. This story about a tax collector named Levi (or Matthew) is found in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke.

All three tell the same story. Jesus has been performing miracles and has healed a paralyzed man. As he's going along, he calls out to Levi. Let's look at the account found in Luke's gospel chapter 5.

²⁷ After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, ²⁸ and Levi got up, left everything, and followed him.

²⁹ Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. ³⁰ But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

31 Jesus answered them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 32 I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

Luke5:27-32 NIV

One thing I've come to appreciate from our lead pastor, Rick and his teaching as well as many others like Tim Mackie from The Bible Project and even the TV show The Chosen, is that they work hard to help us understand the context of what we are reading.

So often we read these words in the Bible as flat and matter of fact. We miss the richness of what the first century folks would have known or experienced and therefore we miss the intensity of what is going on.

It's like when we read about other historical events...unless we see the people in the story as real people who were living real lives and

facing real problems, we treat it just words on a page.

Think about how people perceive life before the internet or before you could binge watch your favorite show on Netflix/Hulu/Disney plus, or before the cell phone.

Or serious, life altering events like the Vietnam War, segregation, World War 2, 9/11 etc. Those who have no understanding of what life was really like before that time and during that time, those who only came after the history had been written, don't fully grasp the intensity.

Just think in another 20 years, we will have young adults who will have no idea how much COVID took away. They will live in a post COVID world with no understanding of what it was like to have the world shut down completely.

And so it is as we read scripture.

Going the extra mile to really grasp what was going on and how life-changing and mind-blowing it was to those who were experiencing it firsthand is tremendously helpful.

To that end, let's look at this dinner party as illustrated in the show "The Chosen" where the writers have fleshed out a little more of what that dinner might have looked like based on what we know about this time in history.

VIDEO "The Chosen" Matthew's Dinnerⁱⁱⁱ

In this retelling, we see that some of the body language and inferences add some dimension and richness to the verses we read earlier.



The writers imagine based on scripture, historical data and human relationships what that scene might have been like. We see a devout religious man who seems genuinely

concerned about Jesus and how he is defiling himself by the company he keeps.

Side note, have you or anyone you know felt this when certain people show up at church? Just something to consider.

Anyway, we see the visible discomfort that having a Roman show up creates and we are reminded of the tension and anxiety created by the occupation and how life was not so great for those who were anything other than a Roman citizen or a lacky for them.

The Romans were brutal oppressors. So if you are in the religious crew and you believe that freedom from these godless heathens is going to come only if all of Israel will clean up their act and follow the 600 plus laws, you can understand the extreme feelings you might have finding this supposed Messiah defiling himself with such “scum” by sharing a meal with them.

And Jesus being in the home of Matthew and sharing a meal with him and his friends would have been a life-changing experience for Matt and his friends.

As you saw in the clip and as we know from numerous accounts in the gospels, these folks were on the outside. Unwelcome in religious circles and yet here comes Jesus.

Not just a preacher. Not just a teacher but a guy who is doing miracles and who is speaking in ways that indicate he is the promised Messiah, the chosen one.

He represents God and instead of striking you down where you stand... instead of heaping more shame and guilt on you, he invites you to follow him, to become more of the more you were made for. He enters your home. He spends time with you and your friends. Unheard of. Unbelievable. Unexpected.

So, what about this Matt guy? What do we know of him?

We know that in this time in history, most people were illiterate and even those who were taught to read were only young boys whose families could spare them from family work (kind of like it was when my grandparents were younger).

These boys were educated at Hebrew school where they would learn the alphabet and memorize the Torah. To be knowledgeable beyond that would not have been common.

As I was preparing, I came across a great video that highlights some key things about Matthew. This video is from pastor and YouTuber Brandon Robbins. His video was very helpful, and we will see a few clips today.
^{iv} Let's start with learning a bit about Matthew's knowledge. Let's watch:

Video: Matthew Clip one

So we know Matthew was an educated guy. And that would have made him a prime candidate for the position of a tax collector. But what was the big deal about tax collectors?

Well...let's watch:

Video: Matthew Clip two

So taxes were steep and oppressive to an already struggling group of people. And then to have those taxes being collected and enforced by your own people. People who were helping to support and enable the enemy, the Roman government. Tax collectors as he said were often crooked and took advantage of their own people.

Understanding how the system worked and what these collectors did, maybe makes it easier to understand why they were outcasts

and not welcome in most circles, especially in religious ones.

And why it would be so shocking to see Jesus not only speak with Matthew but invite him to follow him and to attend a dinner party with more of Matthew's tax collecting buddies.

So, we know many would have been confused about what Jesus was doing with this guy but wouldn't Matthew's friends also have been confused?

I mean what makes a guy leave such a lucrative and secure job, to follow Jesus. He walks away from a LOT of money and from the protection of Rome to follow Jesus. I suspect his friends show up at the dinner party to see what that was all about.

Well let's watch one last clip that supposes what reality for Matt might have been.

VIDEO: Matthew clip three

Now we can't know for sure, but I suspect much like the woman Rick talked about last week, the one who washed Jesus' feet with her tears, perfume and hair, I suspect that Matthew had been hearing and seeing from a distance what Jesus had been doing.

I suspect he had heard that Jesus was not at all what was expected. That instead of bringing down fire and brimstone, he was extending an offer to follow him, to learn from him.

He was specifically seeking out those who would never have been welcome in the temple. Those who had no hope or chance of being made right with God because of their sin. And I think Matthew wondered... "I wonder if that offer would extend to me."

Knowing that he was on the outside, and as

we heard earlier, most likely disowned and ostracized, I think Matthew hopes and then is shocked to be called out by Jesus and invited to follow him.

I think of all the shame, the guilt, the hopelessness that he may have been feeling and here's Jesus offering him a better way. All he has to do is receive the invitation.

So if you find yourself in that same place as Matthew, wondering can it be? Can this be for me? The answer is yes.

If you've been a doubter, a skeptic, a wayward son or daughter, a traitor, if you have fallen short in any way and in all ways, Jesus is calling you too.

Jesus says to you Follow Me. Follow me and see if knowing me will make your life better and make you better at life.

And we see Matthew do just that. Jesus calls him and he leaves it all behind to follow Jesus. He receives the invitation.

What's not revealed to us is what happens between those two short sentences.^v There's nothing about how much time elapsed between the calling and the dinner party Matthew throws but logically, I think, there had to be a little bit of time.

I think Matthew had to come to the point where he felt a connection with Jesus and the rest of the disciples. I think he probably had to have an experience of feeling accepted; feeling like he belonged.

I think he probably had to have a sense that something in his heart was changing for the better because of Jesus.

And I think when he got to that point, it

occurred to him: “*what about all my tax-collecting buddies?* I want them to know Jesus like I know Jesus. I want them to experience what I have experienced. I want them to grow and change like I am growing and changing. But I’m not sure I can explain it all to them very well.”

And then I think Matthew began to wonder: “What could I do to get a bunch of my friends and their families (and maybe even *their* friends and families) up close and personal with Jesus?”

“I mean, they won’t stand in the crowds when Jesus goes around teaching because the people hate them.

“And they certainly won’t go to the synagogue when Jesus is teaching because people like them – and like me – aren’t welcome there. According to the Pharisees, we’re *unclean*. And they’re probably right.”

And I can imagine that Matthew pondered this for a few days and then it hit him. “I know. I’ll create an environment where all my friends (and their friends) will feel safe.

“I’ll create an experience that feels like it was designed with them in mind (because it will be). *I’ll throw a party* with Jesus as the guest of honor and just let him be Jesus; let him do His thing; let Him speak to them in ways they’ll understand ... in hopes that some of them will want to follow Him like I did.”

And then, I can imagine Matthew going to Jesus and the disciples and pitching the idea. “Guys, I know I haven’t been around very long. And I know most of you are surprised that I’m even a part of this group. Believe me, I am, too. But I have a favor to ask. Would you help me reach my friends and their families?”

And then he shares the vision of the party he

wants to throw.

And Jesus – who never could resist a good party (which is why the Pharisees labeled him “a drunkard and a glutton”) – says yes. And he turns to the rest of the disciples and says “boys and girls, we’re *all* going to Matthew’s party. He needs our help and we’re going to give it to him.”

And that’s what they did.

Now, we don’t know if any of Matthew’s buddies became followers of Jesus. My guess is that it turned out much like it does today whenever people get up close and personal with Him.

- Some go all-in and life is never the same.
- Some follow for a while then get distracted.
- Some debate it for a while and then decide it’s not for them.

- Some dismiss Jesus right away. “It’s not my cup of tea. I have no interest.”

But that’s not the point of the story.

The point is that after receiving the invitation for himself, Matthew reciprocates by inviting.

He doesn’t keep the invitation to himself, he doesn’t keep Jesus to himself. He experiences a life change and so he turns around and invites his friends to do the same.

He invites them to come and see what Jesus has to offer. And that’s what I love about our church.

See I have a lot of family and friends who don’t know Jesus. When we moved to Kansas City, we found North Heartland and I was so grateful. I knew it was the kind of place I could invite my family and friends too and they would

be welcome to hear about Jesus and hopefully to hear him calling them and inviting them to follow him.

I am hard wired by God to be a door keeper and so I love that He led my husband and I to a door keeper church. What does that mean?

Well if you go to our ***Orientation class*** which is coming up in a couple of weeks (first Sunday of April), you can learn more but I'll point out that as you come in the door of North Heartland there is a literal door on the wall with a portion of a poem on it.

The poem is one that spoke to Rick as he and the core group were beginning this church and I so resonate with it. Let me read you a portion:

I Stand By the Door by Sam Shoemaker

I stand by the door.

I neither go too far in, nor stay too far out.

*The door is the most important door in the
world -*

*It is the door through which men walk when
they find God.*

*There is no use my going way inside and
staying there,*

*When so many are still outside and they, as
much as I,*

Crave to know where the door is.

And all that so many ever find

Is only the wall where the door ought to be.

They creep along the wall like blind men,

With outstretched, groping hands,

*Feeling for a door, knowing there must be a
door,*

Yet they never find it.

So I stand by the door.

The most tremendous thing in the world

*Is for men to find that door - the door to God.
The most important thing that any man can
do*

*Is to take hold of one of those blind, groping
hands*

*And put it on the latch - the latch that only
clicks*

And opens to the man's own touch.

*Men die outside the door, as starving
beggars die*

*On cold nights in cruel cities in the dead of
winter.*

Die for want of what is within their grasp.

*They live on the other side of it - live because
they have not found it.*

*Nothing else matters compared to helping
them find it,*

And open it, and walk in, and find Him.

*So I stand by the door. I admire the people
who go way in.*

*But I wish they would not forget how it was
Before they got in. Then they would be able
to help*

*The people who have not yet even found the
door.*

*Or the people who want to run away again
from God.*

*You can go in too deeply and stay in too long
And forget the people outside the door.*

*As for me, I shall take my old accustomed
place,*

*Near enough to God to hear Him and know
He is there,*

*But not so far from men as not to hear them,
And remember they are there too.*

Where? Outside the door -

*Thousands of them. Millions of them.
But - more important for me -
One of them, two of them, ten of them.
Whose hands I am intended to put on the
latch.
So I shall stand by the door and wait
For those who seek it.

I had rather be a door-keeper
So I stand by the door.*

Friends we are a door keeper church. We stand by the door. We help people like me, like Matthew, and like any of you who want your friends and family to come and see what Jesus has to offer.

It's why we do church the way we do church. We assume that not everyone in the room has received the invitation. We assume not everyone believes, knows or understands who

Jesus is and what He offers to us.

It's why we work extra hard and kick it up a notch or two at Christmas and Easter since those are key times when those who don't yet follow Jesus are more open to the invitation. It's why Rick does an At the Movies series and why we do special events like Jingle Jam and gaming tournaments. We want to make the most of every opportunity to allow our folks who know Jesus to reciprocate and invite their friends and family who don't to come and see.

And since Easter is quickly approaching, if you follow Jesus I want to invite you to start praying and asking who might Jesus want you to invite to come with you. To experience an opportunity to hear what Jesus has to say and his invitation to follow him.

Ask him even now to be preparing the way for that invitation. Who is the one, the two, the ten you are meant to invite.

Now whenever we talk about this, inevitably there are people who don't have a person. For whatever reason, they may not know someone who they can invite and if that's you, or even if you are ready to invite I want to challenge you with two more ways you can help.

Specifically I want to challenge you to impact and influence.

We know that at any given party, there are people working behind the scenes to make things happen that make a huge difference. If Matthew's friends had shown up to no food, or an uncomfortable environment, it would have been a distraction. And it's true here.

When you or someone else takes the risk to invite a friend, you want it to be just right, right? I mean you want the building to be clean and smelling good. You want the First Impressions

team to be rocking it with friendly smiles and hot tasty coffee.

You want the music to be excellent and to be able to see and hear everything. You want the teaching pastor to be prepared and engaging.

If the people you invited have kiddos, you want them to feel safe and comfortable leaving their children in Adventureland and you want their kids to LOVE it. You want their students to feel seen and valued and engaged.

Every person who volunteers at North Heartland has a tremendous impact on the environment people experience when they come in here.

So if you are regularly serving as a volunteer in one of our many ministries. THANK YOU. What you do matters. Truly. You are allowing Jesus to work through you and to reach those who don't yet know him. Thank YOU.

Now some of you are newer or maybe have gotten out of the habit of volunteering, no worries. We have an ongoing system that helps provide you with opportunities to learn about and experience our volunteer teams. Three times a year we offer what we call “Say Yes”.

Say Yes is an opportunity to say yes to trying out volunteering. And we are just kicking off the next season which will go til May. So if you'd like to check that out, go to our website or the QR code on the slide. Such a great way to help impact the world and make a difference.

So you can invite, you can impact and then you can influence.

Have you ever been to a party where no one

acknowledges you or worse gives you “the look” that clearly says you don’t belong? Have you been to a party where you got cornered by someone who complained about the host and what a lame party it was? Or other awkward scenarios?

Your presence, attitude and engagement matters. Recently my husband and I were guests at a church we visited when out of town and I was reminded just how much it matters to have people who are not volunteering who smile and seem engaged welcome you.

When we invite a friend or someone is seeking and they show up here who they engage with matters. If people are friendly and engaging it matters!

I know it gets easy to show up and just hang out with your crew, if you have one, but I want to challenge you to say hello to others. Smile and greet people warmly.

Pause your conversations with those you

know to say hello to those you don't. Now just a little tip from me...I don't ask people if they are new when I meet someone. I just ask how long they've been coming to NHCC. So give it a try this next season, smile and be friendly.

As we close our time together today, I'm reminded that this desire to invite, to impact and to influence it comes from being up close and personal with Jesus and his grace.

Like Rick taught us last week, sometimes we have lost touch with how much forgiveness Jesus has offered us.

We measure ourselves against other sinners or the tax collectors in our lives instead of against Jesus.

See the measuring stick for holiness isn't the terrible sinners you know or have heard of, the measuring stick for holiness is Jesus.

The one who lived the perfect life and did everything right and then died the death we

should have died and paid for our sin.

I think the two biggest barriers to us reciprocating the invitation is either we haven't yet received the invitation for ourselves OR we have forgotten what it was like when we received and accepted the invitation.

We have lost touch with where we would be without Jesus and his mercy and grace.

I want to take some time to repeat the exercise Rick took us through last week.

So, what I'm going to do is read through the list of sins that Rick read to us last week. The list includes attitudes of the heart as well as behaviors.

This week I want to ask you to just close your eyes and confess to God any of these that are true for you and repeat the phrase Forgive me Lord in your heart and mind.

Ok, here we go ...

For living in one of the wealthiest civilizations in the history of the world and always wanting more.

Forgive me Lord.

For treasuring my stuff more than I treasure my people.

Forgive me Lord.

For being capable and smart and treating as inferior, those who are less capable and less smart.

Forgive me Lord.

For sexual sins of the body and of the mind.

Forgive me Lord.

For being self-absorbed.

Forgive me Lord.

For failing to speak words of encouragement to people in desperate need of words of encouragement.

Forgive me Lord.

For minimizing my faults while maximizing the faults of others.

Forgive me Lord.

For repeating things about others that simply do not need to be repeated.

Forgive me Lord.

For assuming a pure motivation on my part while judging the motivation of others.

Forgive me Lord.

For using my humor to make someone look foolish and stupid.

Forgive me Lord.

For using my power and position to make my life easy at the expense of others.

Forgive me Lord.

For playing the victim instead of taking the responsibility that's mine.

Forgive me Lord.

Jesus thank you for the invitation to follow you and to be saved from our sins. I pray that if we have not accepted your invitation, we will now.

And if we already have I pray we will remember that it is *Our* sin that put you on the cross as much as anyone else.

Let us not forget where we would be without you. For Jesus you say you did not come to call those who thought they were righteous but those who knew they were sinners in need of

repentance.

And like Matthew, help us to be bold in inviting those who don't know you to come and see about you.

Help us join together as a church to impact and influence the world by our volunteering, our attitudes, our humility and our reflection of your love and mercy and grace to the world around us.

Amen.

Now please stand and sing this last song as a declaration of all that the Lord has done in your life.

Closing

I want to challenge you from now til Easter to set an alarm at 5:32 (Luke 5:32) either am or pm your call. And at that time, pray one of these two prayers.

Lord, help me to receive and respond to your invitation to follow you.

OR

Lord, help me to remember where I would be without you and from that place to be bold in inviting, impacting and influencing others. Let me reflect the hope they can have in you.

Have a Matthew story? Share it with us (show slide)

See you next week as we continue in our series.

ⁱ This section taken from Rick McGinniss' message on 3/13/22

ⁱⁱ <https://www.stevethomason.net/2017/02/19/table-sermon-luke-736-50/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://vimeo.com/412843483>

^{iv} https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HHVm8oOPTPU&ab_channel=BrandonRobbins

^v This section taken from Rick McGinniss' message on 9/13/20 "Some Things Never Change"