

Can You Hang with Jesus?

In **Luke 5:27-28**, Jesus called a tax collector named Levi (also known as Matthew) to follow Him. Levi left everything and followed Jesus. Not only did he follow Jesus, he wanted others to as well. He threw a big party and invited all his tax collector friends over for the feast to meet Jesus in **Luke 5:29-32**.

The Pharisees were not pleased with this at all. If Jesus were so spiritual, why on earth would He eat with such sinners as the tax collectors? Surely the real Messiah would not spend His time with the spiritual riffraff when He could rub elbows with some true spiritual giants like the Pharisees.

Jesus responded with His characteristic wisdom, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” (**Luke 5:31-32**, ESV).

On the surface, it may appear that Jesus is saying, “Pharisees, there is no need for Me to hang out with you. You are already righteous. That would be like a doctor trying to spend time with the healthy. It would be pointless.” But that is not Jesus’ point at all. The fact is Jesus had called the Pharisees to repentance as well (cf. **Matthew 23**). In fact, He had taught that our righteousness has to exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees (**Matthew 5:20**).

What then was Jesus’ point? His point was that these Pharisees needed to understand they were no better than the tax collectors. The tax collectors were no worse sinners than the Pharisees. They were both on the same footing. The Pharisees problem was that they thought they were healthy. Like the brethren in Laodicea, the Pharisees thought they were rich, prosperous, and needed nothing. Instead, they were wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked (**Revelation 3:17**). The Pharisees were happy to admit that the tax collectors were wretched, but make that claim for themselves? No way.

Sadly, I think many modern churches and Christians are making the same mistake the Pharisees did. They think that the real Messiah wouldn’t want messed up people. He would only want people who have finally gotten it together. So we spend all our time trying to prove how righteous we are. But that falls flat on its face when we consider **Romans 10:3**. If we keep trying to establish our own righteousness, we simply prove we are ignorant of God’s righteousness and we never actually attain righteousness.

If we want to come to Jesus, we have to admit we are sinners. It’s only messed up sinners that Jesus admits into His presence. He didn’t come to call the righteous. It’s only when we quit trying to impress Jesus with our righteousness that He is interested in calling us. As long as we are trying to prove how righteous we are, we are of no use to Jesus, and frankly, He is of no use to us.

But when we can declare that we are sinners, spiritually sick, in need of the Great Physician’s touch, then we become useful to Jesus. And then He becomes our Savior. He will enter in and abide with us, dining with us, healing us.

At that point, are we free to think of how righteous we are in comparison to everyone else who hasn’t come to Jesus? Are we allowed to look down and condescend to those who have not been able to express their own sinfulness and need for a Savior? Not according to **Titus 3:1-7**. Rather, when we are in Christ and we see others still in their sins, we need to remember where we came from. We need to remember that but for God’s grace we would still be right out there with those who haven’t come to God’s grace yet. Further, we need to remember **I Corinthians 10:12**, “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (ESV). We are just one sinful decision away from going headlong back into that old life. The moment we think we are righteous on our own instead of continually recognizing our need for the Physician to be righteous, we will go right back into our sin and death.

Remember who Jesus came to call. If we aren’t willing to face our own sinfulness, we will never be able to stand with Jesus. But if we will come to Him humbly expressing our absolute and desperate need for His forgiveness and healing, He will never turn us away. That is, after all, why He came: to call the sin sick to repentance.

--Edwin L. Crozier