

"If Jesus FACEBOOKED – Debate over Hanging out w/Sinners"

I got permission from my wife Becky to tell this story ☺

- In Tucson, we were able to walk alongside friends of our family whose son Daniel was dying with double leukemia.
- In Daniel's final months, we attempted to live as much life with him as possible; he was allowed to do almost anything [within reason].
 - On Memorial Day of that year = we had water wars inside & out
 - On the 4th of July = we fired off bottle rockets; hitting our neighbors van.
 - In September he & his dad Randy took me to the Drag Strip = 1st time
 - 1 of the sponsors of the Drag races that evening was the restaurant 'Hooters.'
 - Daniel had just turned 13 ~ a lot of this was a new experience for him; it didn't take him long to spot some of the nice waitresses from 'Hooters' who were dressed in their work uniforms.
 - He quickly mis-read the writing on their tee-shirts & said, "Uncle Tim, what does 'Hot-ties' mean?"
 - I took a deep gulp & gave the best church answer I could come up with; "Daniel, I have no idea what that means; better ask your dad; but please don't ask your mother when you get home tonight." ☺

Steve Sjogren in his book Outflow writes about...

- When he was pastoring a church in Cincinnati, one of his small groups decided to eat together @ 'Hooters.' He explains that Hooter's reputation doesn't exactly rise or fall on its food. It is a restaurant known for the provocative way in which its young female servers are dressed.
- Few see those servers as they really are. Many are single moms who are doing their best to get by & make a living.
- The small group members prepared a dozen gift bags to give to each of the kitchen crew & the servers that day. They stuffed them with gourmet candy, granola bars, bottles of water & other things they might enjoy.
- Cindy (their server) saw the bags & she asked, "Is it someone's birthday?" No, they responded, these are for you & everyone else who works here. We would like to show God's love for you in a practical way.
- Cindy responded, 'Let me go tell the manager!' After a few tense moments the manager appeared. "So, what are you guys doing?" He asked. The manager listened carefully to the plan & then said, "When Cindy told me there was a group of Christians out here wanting to ask me a question; I didn't know what to expect; but you guys are welcome any time."
- One by one, the Hooters employees came and received a gift bag. Many of them asked, "And why are you doing this for us?"

What if every time people saw Christians - Jesus' followers - approaching, they would say, "Here come those people who do such kind things because of the God they represent?"

So, how do people VIEW us when they SEE us coming?

I'm concerned this is not often our reputation among those outside of the church. In fact, we've been guilty of isolating ourselves in 'Holy Huddles,' attempting to keep a safe distance from the very people Jesus called, 'His friends.'

Today I want you to pay close attention to how Jesus treated people who were as far from God as you can imagine.

Turn with me to...

- I. Hanging out with Sinners
 - a. (R) Mark 2: 13 – 14a or p. 762 in pew Bible
 1. We find Jesus was once again teaching by the Sea of Galilee.
 2. The text says, "...as He was walking along He saw Levi (Matthew) sitting @ his tax collector's booth." By all indications this tax booth beside the Sea of Galilee was primary used for taxing fisherman.
 - b. (R) Mark 2: 14b
 1. As you probably know, tax collectors were 'universally disliked' & even hated by some of the Jewish population in ancient Palestine.
 2. The reason for their distain was 'well earned' on multiple levels:
 - a. 1st = people who were being taxed, never knew how much they had to pay; the tax collectors extracted from them as much as they could possibly get in order to line their pockets with the surplus that remained after the demands of the law had been met.
 - b. 2nd = tax collector's were hated by most Jews because of their support of Rome; not only were they the 'occupying enemy,' but they were also 'unclean Gentiles'.
 3. A Jewish person who accepted such an office was excommunicated from the synagogue & was a public shame + embarrassment to his family & friends.
 - a. There was not much desirable about Levi. He was greedy, valuing money over his reputation, respectability and concern for his own people, sacrificing his standing & ceremonial purity for a buck.
 - b. This was the type of man Jesus chose to 'BEFRIEND.'
 4. The Bible says, "...that Jesus called Levi to be His disciple & that Levi got up & followed Him."
 - a. More than any other disciple, Levi had a clear idea of how much it would cost him to follow Jesus; he literally left it all to follow Jesus!
 - b. Levi walked away from a very lucrative occupation; he literally snubbed his employer ROME; guaranteeing no return if he changed his mind. The other disciples could always return to fishing if this didn't work out; if he failed he was guaranteed a life of poverty; in all probability his standing with his family never changed = still ostracized.
 5. So, why did he walk away from his security & fortune? The text doesn't answer this directly but gives us some room to better understand.
 - a. He had to be lonely ~ he had an ache in his heart that he couldn't fix.
 - i. Sitting alongside of the sea front he must have listened often on the outskirts of the crowds to Jesus' msg; something must have been stirring in his heart.
 - ii. Where else could Levi go? Not to the orthodox good people of his day; to them he was unclean & they would have refused to have anything to do with him.
 - b. Another reason: Levi got clean hands. From now on he could look the world in the face; he might be poorer & life much more difficult; but @ least his hands were now clean + his mind was @ rest!
 6. Have you ever met someone who left it all to follow Jesus = be His disciple?

- a. On Tuesday Phil & I met with Lee McFarland who is now the Sr. Pastor of Radiant Life Church in Surprise, AZ.
- b. Lee has a remarkable testimony:
 - i. Early in life Lee was recruited by Micro-Soft & became the Chief Operating Officer of their international division.
 - ii. I asked him if he reported to Bill Gates; he said yes but he directly reported to his wife Melinda Gates.
 - iii. In his mid-30s he was a multi-millionaire many times over; Lee said Micro-Soft Computers was dripping with money.
 - iv. He was very content = he referred to his retirement fund as a set of 'golden handcuffs' so lucrative, no one ever left them.
- c. When he was 37 yrs old he was attending a small church in Seattle; one night the Pastor was teaching & said; Jesus is calling one of you to follow Him; to leave your vocation.
 - i. Lee knew God was calling him. He had no Bible training and no experience; he walked away from his fortune of millions & millions of dollars that has continued to rise in value.
 - ii. Small church of senior citizens called him to lead a new church work in Surprise, AZ.
 - iii. Starting salary = \$22,000 annually; he silently prayed that God would give him a person for every stock option.
 - iv. After 12 yrs Radiant Life is well over 7,000 people every weekend & the last couple of Easters they've held services at Cardinal stadium.

Who knows? God may be speaking to you to get up & follow Him?

c. (R) Mark 2: 15

- 1. Bible says, Jesus had quite a reputation for 'Hanging out with Sinners;'
 - a. "...disreputable sinners," = MSG translates "riffraff," Amplified translates this as "persons definitely stained with sin; especially wicked sinners; simply "bad people."
 - b. Don't neglect who he is talking about:
 - i. Jesus 'BEFRIENDED' not only prostitutes; common crooks & drunkards.
 - ii. He also called the 12 disciples His friends.
 - a. Levi-Matthew made most of his living through extortion & embezzlement.
 - b. Simon the Zealot was a radical insurgent who violently opposed anyone who came against Orthodox Judaism.
 - iii. Among the women Jesus counted as close friends was Mary Magdalene whom he had cast out 7 demons.
 - a. Mark 2: 16

Jesus chose not to keep His distance from sinners; in fact He seemed to relish immersing Himself in the lives of riffraff = He was right @ home with people like us ☺

To Jesus sinners were not bad people [nor] untouchables; they were people with faces & histories like us = they were His friends!

II. (R) Mark 2: 17 = Jesus' purpose & mission

- The orthodox Jews were afraid of becoming unclean by hanging out with sinners; they were afraid of being infected by sin.

- They were like the priests during the 'Black Plague' in England that sequestered themselves for fear of dying.
- Not Jesus = He refused to leave them in their sin-made messes; not only did He forgive their sins; He invited them into His community of people who were being made new.
- Our MISSION as a church follows the example of Jesus!
 - Don't misunderstand what Jesus did by 'Hanging out with Sinners:' He wasn't spending time with sinners because He had the most in common with them; because He was one of them = far from it!
 - Jesus came to help those people who needed Him; realized they were lost & internally empty; for those He welcomed them as friends.
- Who are your friends on your FACEBOOK account? If all your friends love Jesus [accidental holy huddle] I challenge you to:
 - Pray that God would give you new eyes to see people like He does:
 - Pray that God would melt away any judgmental attitudes that polarize you from others who are lonely & hurting.
 - Pray that you could lead your peer groups to be friends of Jesus!