

In a time of strict religious hierarchy and exclusion, Jesus dared to challenge the status quo with grace, mercy, and forgiveness. He welcomed despised tax collectors, notorious sinners, and social outcasts – the same people the self-righteous Pharisees avoided. But today it sometimes feels as if His church has a harder time attracting those same people. Why? Could it be that somewhere along the way, we've lost sight of what made Jesus a true "friend to tax collectors and sinners" (Mat 11:19)? People are still searching, hurting, and longing for connection, but too often, the church isn't the first place they turn. This morning, we're starting our yearlong journey through Luke 15 where Jesus rewrites our rules, revealing a God who welcomes the lost, celebrates the found, and turns our thinking on its head. The challenge for us is to look at Jesus' familiar parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Prodigal Son, but with fresh eyes. Let's start by rediscovering the Sinner's Jesus.

1. Sinners Were Drawn to Jesus:
 - a. In the gospels we read, "Many... sinners came" to Jesus. | Mat 9:10
 - b. And that, "[Notorious] sinners were all [continually] drawing near to hear Him." | Luk 15:1
 - c. Consequently, "many [sinners] followed Him." | Mrk 2:15
2. Who Were These Sinners?
 - a. The term sinner encompassed a wide range of individuals: from Roman collaborators (Luk 19:7), to prostitutes (Mat 21:31), to the irreligious (Jhn 9:16), and those marginalized by circumstances (Luk 13:1-5; Jhn 9:1-3, 34).
3. The Sinner's Jesus (Jhn 8:2-11):
 - a. He didn't pile on but defended the sinner from the self-righteous mob. | vv. 2-6; cf. Luk 7:36-50
 - b. Convicted of sin, without condemning. | vv. 7-11; cf. Jhn 3:17-21
 - c. Forgave with grace, compassion, mercy, and love. | v. 11; cf. Luk 19:9-10
4. The Pharisee's Judgmental View of Sinners:
 - a. Blinded them with self-righteousness. | Luk 18:9-14
 - b. Fueled their criticism of Jesus. | Luk 15:2; cf. 5:30; 19:5-7
 - c. Created a chasm between them and sinners. | Luk 7:36-40
 - d. Distorted the Gospel's message of grace. | Act 15:1-5, 11
5. Would the "notorious sinners" of Jesus' day feel as welcomed and loved by us as they did by Him?
6. Overcoming a Judgmental View of Sinners:
 - a. Too often, Christians judge the heart and motives of sinners. | Luk 6:37-38
 - i. On FB I recently posted this question, "What kind of Jesus do sinners like?" The answers revealed many Christians think sinners are only interested in a permissive Jesus who is non-judgmental, with no commandments and doesn't challenge their choices.
 - ii. One person said sinners "don't like Jesus."
 - iii. Another person reached out to me saying one of her children saw my post was really excited about it - till he read the responses. "Mom, it's the same old judgmental attitudes."
 - b. Remember, we too were once sinners now saved by His grace. | 1 Cor 6:9-11
 - c. As welcomed sinners, we welcome other sinners. | Rom 15:7

Imagine a world where the church is known not for judgmental attitudes, but for its radical, life-changing love. A world where Christians actively seek the lost and embrace the hurting, offering them the same grace and compassion Jesus extended to them. This isn't a pipe dream; this is the legacy He left us. Challenging the self-righteous, Jesus welcomed sinners and offered hope to the hopeless. He showed us that His love isn't judgmental; it's compassionate. It isn't contemptuous; it's gracious. It isn't restricted; it's welcoming. And so let us be the church that aligns with our Savior's mission "to seek and to save the lost" (Luk 19:10) and means it with every fiber of our being. Let us be the church that embodies the sinner's Jesus.