



## Theme: Jesus Loves People THIS Much

### *"Those Not Welcome...at the Table"*

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber, June 6-7, 2026, at Summit Church, Durango

#### Weekly Memory Verse:

***<sup>9</sup>As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at his tax collector's booth. "Follow me and be my disciple," Jesus said to him. So, Matthew got up and followed him. – Matthew 9:9***

#### SLIDE Jesus Loves People THIS Much:

##### *Those Not Welcome...at the Table*

Today we begin a new series of sermons looking at how Jesus loved people and **the kind of people that he loved**. By looking at some of these beautiful stories we find in the gospels **we can find ourselves** and see how it is God meets us during times and spaces in our lives where there is brokenness and hurt. Jesus began his public ministry by proclaiming that he had come to **release the captive and to heal the broken** and reached **the lost**. He wanted to let people know that they were made by God to be loved by God which is why we talk about that almost every week. Yes, Jesus came to give his life and **during his life he showed us**

what it looked like to **sacrificially love** people. I want to start with a question that I think applies to every one of us.

**SLIDE      WHEN have you not felt welcome?**

When have you not felt included? Because I was held back in 6th grade because I was too smart and too small, I ended up being the first person in my high school to get my driver's license with a birthday on October 1st. We had moved just before high school so I didn't really know anyone, and I was so excited when the popular group of 3 girls that were the prettiest according to everyone asked me if I would take them to the STYX concert.

**GRAPHIC      Styx – Paradise Theatre**

If you're not familiar with the band, they were a big hit back in 1980. Styx's 1981 concept album Paradise Theatre is a legendary classic-rock release. It is best known for its two massive hit singles, "The Best of Times" and "Too Much Time on My Hands." They also were known with songs such as "Babe", "Renegade," "Lady," and "Come Sail Away," which was the theme song at my prom. Needless to say, I was pretty excited to be going to a Styx concert with three of the most popular girls in school. I even paid for parking at the Oakland Coliseum and when we got out to walk towards the arena, they looked at me and said, "Did you get a ticket to?"

It was a crushing learning experience to be invited but then not even welcomed and offered a ticket to the event. They told me when they would be ready to be picked up and I was even more flabbergasted than they expected me to wait for them to be done with the concert while I simply sat outside. After they left, I drove home and I believe one of them had to call their father on something we used to call a pay phone because we didn't have cell phones back then. If you don't remember what those look like, I thought I'd get a picture out for you.

**GRAPHIC      Pacific Bell Pay Phone**

## **GRAPHIC          Pay phone today**

I found that phone on eBay and for a mere \$500 you can have it in your home. This was so long ago that it only cost a quarter to make a phone call. Here is what those payphones look like today and that is how I felt after that experience. Those girls never talked to me again but the next year I did get to go to a STYX concert after I bought myself a ticket!

One of the realities of not being invited and not being welcomed is that those memories stick with us and in the 1st century there were many who were not invited to the table and yet Jesus reached out to them and invited them to dine with him. One of those is Matthew the tax collector who is one of the first disciples that Jesus called to follow him. He is also called Levi in the gospels. If we understand how tax collectors were viewed during the time of Jesus, then it's even more stunning that he would call such a person not only to follow him but to be one of those who would lead a movement of the Kingdom of God.

## **GRAPHIC          Roman Road and Aqueduct**

Taxes in the Roman world were important because they funded building projects like roads and aqueducts, as well as paid for public servants. You see all three of those in this depiction of the famous double aqueduct with a road beneath it and soldiers walking along the road. Taxes would pay for all three of these things and paying for the occupying force was always doubly painful because you would be forced to pay taxes for the government that then left soldiers to force you to be Roman and to live by Roman laws.

Conquered people paid exorbitant taxes for the soldiers that were occupying their territory and the opulent lifestyle of Caesar and other rulers. This was a little bit like the colonies in the new world here in America that were forced to pay taxes which paid for the British soldiers who did provide some protection but also demanded much. Taxes were a burden and that was true of anyone who had an occupying force ruling over them, whether it was 250 years ago or 2000 years ago.

There also was a complex taxation system and it wasn't just one tax you would pay but as many as 5. You would pay a tax on goods and services, tax on your land or livestock, taxes on your kids, a tax on yourself which was called a poll tax, tax to both Rome and a regional ruler, and sometimes a road tax just for traveling between cities. This is why we read about a census during the time of the birth of Jesus when Joseph and a very pregnant Mary had to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem. It was not uncommon for people to pay as much as 80 to 90% of their income on taxes!

### **GRAPHIC          Roman Tax Collectors**

You can see these three stone images that depict Roman tax collectors with their books and their pens and people waiting to be assigned their taxes. This was such a common occurrence that there are many depictions of tax collectors doing their job. It was essential to the Roman government, and it kept things moving and it kept people in line to keep them poor and with few resources.

For the Jewish people, their taxes were going towards a government that was ruling over them, and they didn't want to support. They didn't want troops and it was a bit overwhelming and demoralizing to pay such a heavy tax. Whoever collected those taxes were considered employees of the Romans. If you were Jewish and had this job, you were often despised simply because you were working for the enemy. That was enough to make people not like you very much, but someone did have to do the job and hopefully if you were Jewish and doing this job you might cut people a break.

Adding to that tension was the way that Romans collected taxes which was by tax farming. The Romans would separate their occupied territories into different areas and then put them out to bid for tax collectors. The Romans would then determine how much each area should pay in taxes and then tax collectors would bid on those areas at least as much as the Romans wanted to collect. They would bid up front,

and the winner would be assigned some Roman troops to help them collect the taxes needed. The tax collector would cover the taxes for the region and then they would go about collecting from the people the different kinds of taxes that were to be paid.

The tax collectors living would come from how much over and above they could collect from the people in their region. They would sometimes have to muscle people to get them to pay their fair share, but they also needed a profit margin and so they would go about collecting more than what they had paid for that area. They would want a return on their investment of 10 to 25%. They would figure that profit into the taxes. If someone was a wealthy tax collector, it was likely they built in a high profit margin. The people weren't just paying the Romans, but they were also being taken advantage by those tax collectors, some of whom were Jewish.

If the tax collector lived a lavish lifestyle, then it really meant they were taking from the poor to be rich. If people couldn't pay their taxes, then it would be considered a loan because their taxes had already been paid by the tax collector. The interest charged on those loans was approximately 4% a month which would come out to almost 50% a year. And if people couldn't come up with the money they owed for taxes, then the tax collector could take people's resources such as their livestock or family members or land.

Tax collectors were often seen as dishonest. The Jewish writings from the 1st century referred to tax collectors as robbers and thieves. They weren't allowed to testify in a trial or be judges because they were considered liars and cheats. They were leeches, sucking the life out of the common people.

For all these reasons, they were also not welcome in the synagogues if they were Jewish. They were considered unclean and unfair and living an immoral lifestyle. They often were disowned by their families and not welcome to the high holy days that most Jewish families

would celebrate in the 1st century such as the Passover or other feast days.

What is fascinating is how tax collectors seem to be drawn to Jesus. They were even drawn to John the Baptist who is the cousin of Jesus preaching and baptizing people before the ministry of Jesus goes public. Tax collectors are mentioned 23 times in the gospels, which is more than any other profession. Fishermen are only mentioned four times by name, so tax collectors show up five times more often. Luke 3 describes this scene with John the Baptist.

### **BIBLE**

**<sup>11</sup> John replied, “If you have two shirts, give one to the poor. If you have food, share it with those who are hungry.”**

**<sup>12</sup> Even corrupt tax collectors came to be baptized and asked, “Teacher, what should we do?”**

**<sup>13</sup> He replied, “Collect no more taxes than the government requires.”**

They are not told to quit being tax collectors but simply to be honest about it. Someone needs to have the job so it might as well be someone that does it with a good heart. Tax collectors came often to hear Jesus preach and teach because there was something captivating about his words for them. Luke 15 describes this well.

### **BIBLE**

**Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach. <sup>2</sup> This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such sinful people— even eating with them!**

Jesus then goes on to talk about lost sheep and lost coins and lost children, making it clear that he came to spend time with tax collectors and notorious sinners and even to seek them out. The religious leaders, known as the Pharisees, believed that they should be separated from

people like tax collectors and notorious sinners. Their name means “to be separated from” and so they didn't think anyone who consider himself a rabbi like Jesus should be spending time with such people. The belief was that it was not just enough to separate yourself from sin but also to separate yourself from anyone associated with sin.

Of course, this means we must decide who really is sinful and we get into the business of being the judge. We start to play God, and we miss out on the sin that is growing up in our own hearts. Pride is considered the most dangerous of the seven deadly sins because the devil has a way of nurturing that narcissistic tendency inside of us. The very act of judging others and trying to stay away from them because they are sinners leads to a buildup of the most dangerous kind of sin in our hearts.

Extensive research from organizations like the Barna Group reveals a striking “self-awareness gap,” among Christians. While a strong majority of Christians view the Church positively, only about 21% of non-Christians hold a favorable view of it. Despite this, many non-Christians respect the foundational figure of Jesus Christ. Two major surveys last year of more than 10,000 people show some distinct perceptions:

- High regard for Jesus, low regard for Christians.
- 84% of non-Christians have a positive opinion of Jesus Christ.
- Only 47% view local churches positively, and that number drops to 16% for megachurches.
- Nearly 90% of outsiders feel the term “judgmental” accurately describes Christians, viewing the church as a place of criticism rather than unconditional love.
- Political polarization: Many young non-Christians view Christians as synonymous with right-wing political conservatives and feel that religious institutions are overly motivated by political interests.
- Hypocrisy and exclusivity: 88% of non-Christians frequently characterize Christians as hypocritical, anti-homosexual, and

shelter-focused (withdrawn from the real issues facing local communities)

- **Spiritual Openness:** Despite the negative reputation of the institutional Church, Barna Group data indicates that many non-Christians are spiritually curious and hold beliefs that align somewhat with Christianity.

The summary of the survey was that Christians in North America have become the new Pharisees. We've become the ones who look down upon other people and we separate ourselves from sinners and convey a sense of shame or guilt or judgment upon others, failing to see the sin in our own lives. Jesus was just the opposite and sinners were drawn to him. They didn't feel judgment or shame but instead they felt welcomed and invited to the table as he was willing to even eat with them which was an intimate act in the 1st century. They felt grace and mercy and love and I would argue this is what the church needs to strive to be if we are going to be the presence of Jesus Christ in the world.

What's interesting is that most Christians in the survey felt they were doing this and so there is a big disconnect partly because of what is covered in the news and social media and partly because of how we act when we get outside the walls of the church. There seems to be a difference between how we think we treat others and how other people are experiencing us as followers of Jesus. Jesus seemed to understand how easily this could happen which is why he tells a powerful parable and Luke 18.

## **BIBLE**

**<sup>9</sup>Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else: <sup>10</sup>“Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. <sup>11</sup>The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: ‘I thank you, God, that I am not like other people—cheaters, sinners, adulterers. I’m certainly not like that**

**tax collector! <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.'**

**<sup>13</sup> "But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, 'O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.' <sup>14</sup> I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."**

Who would we put in the category of today's sinners and tax collectors? Who are those we might consider unclean by virtue of the career they've chosen or the way they live or what we believe about their motives? Who are the people that good Christians wouldn't associate with? Who are the people that feel most judged by Christians today? How would they feel if they were around us? Would they feel accepted and loved or would they feel scorned? Would they feel grace or would they feel judgment?

I remember visiting a church in Ohio for a leadership conference that was located next to a strip club. There were protests going on outside the strip club by many Christians and this church decided that instead they would enter the strip club during the day when it was closed and offered to clean the toilets for free. They would give a toilet cleaning kit to anybody who joined the church and invited them to clean toilets for people they had always thought of as less than sinners. Pretty soon, some of the women who were at the strip club began coming to church and eventually church people weren't allowed inside to clean toilets because too many of the women were turning to Jesus!

The story reminded me of the fact that Jesus never judged anyone into the Kingdom of heaven but simply invited them to follow and was willing to serve them and loved them to convert them. Following in the footsteps of Jesus is not easy and sometimes it's costly because of what other people will think of us.

I told you last week about my experiences of working in downtown Denver with people living on the streets. We connected with women who we're selling their bodies as prostitutes or working in strip clubs. There was a woman who came in one day and met with our director and gave her a picture of her daughter they'd gone astray and was living somewhere nearby and working on the streets. Our director had each of us look at the picture and pray and my understanding is that one day she did come in and the women who worked with her did everything they could to let her know that she was loved. I don't remember what happened to her or if she ever reconnected with her mother or her family, but it reminded me of how we are invited to love people unconditionally even when we don't get the results we are hoping for.

The purpose of this entire series of sermons has been to remind us of how Jesus loved people more than we can imagine. He loved women who were seen as less than, the sick and the outcast, the rejected, and those who were unwelcome and uninvited to be at the table. Jesus offered love to each of them and invited them to be part of his team and lead his movement which would change the world into the Kingdom of God. Almost everyone that Jesus chooses are the most unlikely.

On occasion I have met with people who have struggled being in our church because they feel like and too easy on sin and I have no conviction. I get that and everyone is entitled to their opinion. I also know that when I look at Jesus, I see someone who had deep conviction and that conviction was grace and mercy. I would suggest to us that grace is just a deeper conviction as some other things that we might choose to be convicted about but then simply end up pushing people away from Jesus and not drawing them towards him.

One of the reasons that Jesus was uncomfortable in the 1st century and probably should make us uncomfortable a bit today is because of his radical inclusion of people at the table where everyone was welcome. As we talk about Jesus calling Matthew the tax collector it is worth noting that Jesus also called Judas who hated the Romans and wanted them

violently killed. He was part of the sicarii which believed in violent overthrow of the Roman government. I can guarantee you there were interesting conversations between the disciples because they were all very different and from different political persuasions. Our church has chosen to live in the messy middle of our political divide because we believe it's here at the table that Jesus welcomes everyone, regardless of their political affiliations.

**SLIDE                    God loves variety**

Our tendency in today's world is to want to label people as woke or right wing or crazy liberal or cruel conservative. None of that is helpful or biblical or what Jesus seemed to model. He valued differences and diversity and reminded us that God created a variety in the world in which we live, whether it's in the animal Kingdom or the plant world or the human genome. Jesus understood that we are better together and his goal was to bring about the Kingdom of God in which everyone was invited. As followers of Jesus, we can't forget that Jesus was constantly choosing people that no one else would have chosen and that many people rejected. Jesus didn't seem to choose people based on merit but often chose them because they didn't have good qualifications.

He chooses 12 disciples that are a strange bunch if we are honest. I have sometimes wondered if he chose several of them as fishermen because they just weren't very good at fishing because every story seems to talk about them not being able to catch anything. Matthew was clearly a tax collector that was either bothered by his profession or was searching for something else as he watched Jesus move about his community because he seemed very willing to follow and to let go of a lucrative career. Jesus doesn't just see what we are, but Jesus sees what we can be.

**SLIDE                    Jesus sees what we can be**

Jesus doesn't see what we have been, but he sees what we will be if we will begin to follow him. He sees value in having different kinds of

people to lead a movement after he is gone. The story of Matthew was clearly important because he shows up and three of the gospels and here is his story as it comes together in those three tellings. We start in Mark 2.

## **BIBLE**

**<sup>13</sup>Then Jesus went out to the lakeshore again and taught the crowds that were coming to him. <sup>14</sup>As he walked along, he saw Levi, son of Alphaeus, sitting at his tax collector's booth. "Follow me and be my disciple," Jesus said to him. So, Levi got up and followed him.**

**<sup>15</sup>Later, Levi invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners. (There were many people of this kind among Jesus' followers.) <sup>16</sup>But when the teachers of religious law who were Pharisees saw him eating with tax collectors and other sinners, they asked his disciples, "Why does he eat with such scum?"**

It's interesting that because sometimes we think that being a Christian is to allow Jesus Christ into our heart to be Lord and savior. I think that's true, but Jesus never uses that language. Jesus doesn't tell the disciples to memorize their Bible or get their theology straight or go to the synagogue every weekend. The invitation given to Matthew is one that is given to each one of us and we find it in Mark, Matthew, and Luke's Gospel.

## **SLIDE "Follow me."**

Jesus doesn't tell them to get their act together first. That's the invitation he gives to each one of us today and every day. Wherever we are either in person or online, Jesus gives one simple invitation, "follow me." We just need to decide if we want to respond. This call is for everyone no matter whether our background or past or political affiliation or culture. One of the reasons the Christian faith connects in every culture and in every language it's because the invitation is for

everyone.

I appreciate how Matthew is depicted in *The Chosen*, the dramatic representation of Jesus' life depicted in film several years ago in season 1, episode 7. They take some liberty in the production and fill in some back story, but I think it's pretty accurate that each of the disciples is very different and quirky. They clearly all have issues. According to the show, Peter and Andrew owed back taxes from their phishing business to Matthew and we get to see the tension when Jesus invites him to follow up. They didn't like the tax collector, and they couldn't believe why Jesus would call this thief, robber, liar, and disreputable sinner.

**VIDEO**     **The Chosen – Matthew (00:31 to 03:08)**

**SLIDE**     **“Get used to different...You’re the host!”**

That is how I picture Jesus, picking the people no one else would imagine and doing it in such a different way that it turns everything upside down. The people who have never been invited to the table are invited to receive the gift of grace because Jesus is a savior that rescues and redeems and restores. He picks the kid left at the door of the concert without a ticket. Jesus chooses us when we feel uninvited or unwelcome at the table.

**SLIDE**     **Jesus welcomes you...**

Jesus wants you on his team and at his table. No matter what your past is or what mistakes we have made, Jesus invites each of us to the table. Jesus sees beyond the masks of popularity and success and chooses you not based on merit but on grace. He wants us to follow so we might go out and do his work in the world and invite others to the table who have felt neglected or left out or judged. I hope we can be a church where we can break down the barriers of hypocrisy and judgmentalism so that people can come with questions and spiritual curiosities and past pain and hurt and know that they are welcome. You want to be a place for people following Jesus who are like the disciples and don't have it all figured out but are willing to follow.

Jesus included everyone at this table. He found the most unlikely of people to be his disciples. He loved them and he could see what they could be, and he dined with them and welcomed them to the table when others scoffed and questioned him eating with scum. Today, Jesus is calling you to be his disciple. You could have walked in this room and not been a follower of Jesus, but you are still welcome to this table if you want to say “yes,” to the gift of grace that he offers you. That's why this table is an open table because the Messiah welcomes everyone. We just must be willing to think differently and get used to it.

**SLIDE                    The Messiah welcomes everyone to the Table**

**SLIDE                    Communion**

## **June 6-7 Order**

1. Countdown
2. Ryan welcomes people and invites them to stand in body or spirit.
3. Song – “Do It Again”
4. Jeff welcomes and shares:
  - A. QR Code
  - B. Communion
  - C. Invites people to greet each other
5. Sermon Video Intro
6. Sermon
7. Communion Invitation
8. Song – “Made for More”
9. Song – “No Longer Slaves”
10. Med Moments
11. Offering (Senior Gifts)
12. Prayer and Lord’s Prayer
13. Care Ministers
14. The Bridge
15. Closing Prayer