

## The Party that Rocked the Religious

### 1. Intro & Context

- Today we're celebrating C@P 10<sup>th</sup> Birthday
- And we're celebrating it in style by throwing a party
- Parties and celebrations are fun
- They're even more fun if there are special people who are there
- Ask children
  - If you were having a party who would be the most special person you would like to invite?
- Ask parents
  - Who is the most famous person that's been at a party you've attended?
  - Feel free to name-drop to your heart's content
  
- Sorry to say we don't have anyone famous coming to today's party – we did try but [Superman] said he already had a party to go to – joking!
  
- Normally when someone famous turns up to a party ... it completely changes the party
- Once I went to a party and Prince Charles was there
  - I didn't technically go to the party
  - I drove past the party
  - Technically I was in the vicinity of the party for a few moments
- But what was amazing was that there was about 25 photographers standing outside the party ... just waiting to get a photo of Prince Charles
  - Just because he was there ... the whole atmosphere of the party was completely changed
  
- Well today we're looking at a passage in the Bible where Jesus turned up to a party ... and the whole atmosphere of the party changed just because he was there
  - Not because of anything he did or said
  - But because of how others reacted to him
  
- As we have our own party here today at C@P
  - I want us to spend the next few minutes considering how we might react to the presence of Jesus our party here today and into our life

## 2. Jesus calls sinners not the religious

- Just prior to this in Ch 5, Jesus has just declared he has the power and authority to forgive sins
  - And then proved he has that power and authority by healing a man of his paralysed legs
- So it's not surprising that the very next thing that Jesus does is start hanging out with a bloke Levi
  
- What's the problem with Levi?
- Told two things about him – one his name is Levi
  - Which means he's probably from the tribe of Levites
  - Levites were Israel's priests and they were responsible for taking care the temple
  - Which means Levi probably come a very religious family
  - Doesn't mean he was the founder of a jeans company
  
- The other thing we're told about Levi is he's a tax collector
  - In Jesus time, the Romans were the rulers of the world and including Israel
  - And as all ruling nations used to do in those days, they imposed taxes on the people they ruled over to help pay for their armies, roads, things
  - And so tax collectors were employed to collect taxes from the Jews to pass it onto the Romans
- What would normally happen is the Romans would put it out to tender
  - And whoever was willing to pay the most money for the contract got the job
  - Then they had to extract taxes out of the fellow countrymen to pay on to the Romans
  - Inevitably, they taxed the people more than they should have ... and so they made a nice little profit and became quite rich at the expense of everyone else
- So not only were they traitors, they were also crooks ...
  - Which meant they were moral and spiritual outcasts who were hated by their fellow countryman
  
- Tax collectors where seen in the same light as a ...
  - Corrupt politician
  - Drug cheating cyclist
  - Dodgy used car salesman
    - [apologies to any politicians and car salesmen here today]

- So what we know is that Levi was
  - morally and spiritually lost
  - publically known as a rebel against God
  - his chosen occupation declared him to be in opposition to God and his people
- He was ancient version of Ned Kelly, or Miley Cyrus or Robbie Williams
  
- This particular day Levi went to work, set up his mobile office, pulled out his abacus and got to work raking in the taxes and lining his pockets
- But before Levi knew it ... Jesus was there standing before him
- As the Son of God, Jesus would've known everything about Levi
  - His profiteering
  - His moral failings
  - His dodgy friends
  - Above all is spiritual failings and rejection of God
- And yet despite all this ... Jesus says to Levi
  - "Follow me"
  - And to his amazement ... Levi found himself getting up, leaving everything behind ... and following Jesus
  
- Just because tax collectors were crooks and traitors, didn't mean they were down and out people with no friends
  - Levi had plenty of mates and money
  - And he decides to throw a party to celebrate Jesus coming into his life
  
- The party he threw in v29 is described as a banquet!
  - Lit = mega feast
  - This is much more than a McDonalds mega-meal
  - This is a great feast
    - Picture a wedding, or a 21<sup>st</sup> or 50<sup>th</sup> birthday party
  
- However, when the Pharisees and TOL come to the party they complained about Jesus and his disciples saying
  - *"Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"*
  
- Pharisees were laymen, not religious professionals
  - They were business men and upstanding members of the community
  - On the school P&C, church wardens, members of the local Lions Club
  - They read the Australian, watched ABC and drove a Volvo – perhaps!

- They were also very, very religious
- The Teachers of the Law on the other hand were the religious professionals
  - They were were responsible for teaching the Law to God's people
  - Think of a Bible college lecturer
- And both groups were there checking up on what this Jesus bloke is saying and doing
- And what they find is that Jesus has accepted this invitation ... not to ...
  - Government House
  - Archbishops residence
  - CEO's breakfast club
- But rather he accepts an invitation to ...
  - A great banquet in Levi's house with the sinners and tax collectors
- It would be as if Pope visited Sydney and instead of having dinner Prime Minister's residence at Kirribilli, he went to a pub in down town Redfern
- No wonder the religious leaders are uncomfortable with what they are seeing
  - Little bit like the lady in this picture
  - They disapproved of what was happening 😊
- And Jesus response is brilliant
- He says
  - *"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. <sup>32</sup> I have not come to call the [self] righteous, but sinners to repentance.*
- You can see how this is the party that rocked the religious
  - It's not the religious rocking it out themselves ... that's a scary thought!
  - No it's a party of sinners, hanging out with Jesus that's rocking the foundations of the religious leaders and making them extremely upset
- Why?
- Because Jesus is hanging out the sinners and tax collectors and not with the religious and moral do-gooders like them
  - They're offended that their religiosity and morality doesn't qualify them to be right with Jesus
- **Application**
- I don't know what your view of Christianity is

- I don't know what you think of Jesus
  - But many people today think like the Pharisees and TOL
  - They think that Christianity is all about being religious and being a good person
- But what Jesus is making clear here is ...
  - He's come to save sinners ... not those who think they are so good and so religious they don't need Jesus
- Jesus came to call sinners, not the religious
- The truth is we are all spiritually and morally sick and in need of the divine doctor
  - There's a bit of Levi in all of us
- What that means is that a place like Church@thepeak is more like the waiting room for a doctor ... and less like a waiting room for a school captains interview
  - In an interview ... we all try to look as clever and impressive as we can and we try and bury or hide our weaknesses
  - But in a doctor's waiting room we assume everyone there is sick and needs help
- And this scene is much closer to the reality of what is going on for those who follow Jesus
- And you know what's good about this?
- When you realise
  - you're not perfect
  - that you are flawed
  - that you're just a broken and imperfect as the next person
- Then you're exactly the person Jesus came to bring healing to
  - For it's the one who realises they need the divine doctor ... that Jesus came to seek and save

### **3. Jesus calls for repentance not morality**

- If we stopped there ... we'd be tempted to think that Jesus was a friend of sinners and leave it at that
  - And if that were the case ... we'd go home thinking
    - "Beauty! ...
      - I know I'm not perfect
      - I know I have my failings

- But that's cool ... because Jesus is a friend of sinners!"
- But to go home thinking that would only be half the story
  
- In what way was Jesus a friend of sinners?
  - Was he just a rebel at heart and wanted to hang out with other rebels?
  - Did he just think like Billy Joel
    - *"I'd rather laugh with the sinners than cry with the saints ... because the sinners are much more fun"*?
  - Was he just hanging out with the drunks and the sinners because he was such an easy going, live-and-let-live kind of Messiah?
  
- We need to be careful of taking this truth that Jesus was a friend of sinners and twisting to what we want it to say and mean
  - So "Jesus ate with sinners" becomes "Jesus loved a good party,"
  - Which becomes "Jesus was more interested in showing love than taking sides,"
  - Which becomes "Jesus always sided with religious outsiders"
  - Which becomes "Jesus was happy to let sin get swept under the carpet"
  
- Yes ... Jesus was a friend of sinners ... but he still called on them to repent of their sin
  - Those last few words in v32 are crucial
    - *I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*
  
- What's repentance?
  - Much more than saying sorry
  - We can all say the words "I'm sorry"
  - We can even show remorse
- But repentance is much more
  - Repentance is turning around and going in another direction
  - Literally means 'changed mind'
  - Means to stop going in the direction you were heading ... and start going in Jesus direction
- Just as Levi, did ... it means to start following and listening to Jesus
  
- Jesus was a friend of sinners
  - not because he was okay with sin or ignored sin
  - but because he wanted them to leave their old life behind and start to follow him

- **Application**

- What this means is ... Jesus calls for repentance, not morality
- The Pharisees and TOL were very moral
  - But they lacked repentance
  - They were unwilling to recognise their sin and their need to follow Jesus
  - They thought they were good enough just as they were
- And so the irony is
  - By thinking they were good enough to be right with Jesus
  - Meant they actually weren't
  
- So it's not our
  - Good deeds
  - Church attendance
  - Baptism
  - Social justice
    - that make us right with God
- It's doing what Levi did
- Because what's true for anyone who follows Jesus ... is what's symbolized by Levi ...
  - That is ... Jesus calls on you and I to leave behind our old way of living, thinking and priorities ... for Jesus ways of living, thinking and priorities
  - For Levi, his tax business represented his rebellion against God
  - So when Jesus said follow me, he got up left it and followed
- That's not saying that following Jesus means giving up your job
  - But it does mean giving up those things that represent your rebellion against God ... whatever they may be
  - Because that's what repentance and following Jesus looks like

#### **4. Conclusion**

- So as we prepare to have our 10<sup>th</sup> birthday party today
- It's good to reflect on this party that Jesus went to
- His presence at the party challenges us and encourages us
- Challenges us because it says
  - The good news of Jesus is not for the religious ... because they fail to see they need healing from the divine doctor
- At the same time ...
  - The good news of Jesus means that sinners like you and I can't just carry on with our life regardless
  - Because Jesus he also calls on sinners like you and I to repent

- But the good news is ... the encouragement for all is ...
  - He saves all who leave whatever it is they need to leave ... and follow him
  
- My prayer for all of us today, you will see ...
  - Jesus calls sinners, not the righteous
  - Jesus calls for repentance, not morality
- And that you and I would not just understand these things ...
  - But that we would heed Jesus call
  - And follow him

**PRAY**