

What Kind of Party is This?

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, great to see you this morning. Folks, how good has it been to hear the stories from two very different individuals, from two very different places, but with one common theme to what they both said, and it's that this God is in the business of transforming lives.
- It's a testimony of everybody who's a Christian, that I was lost, as we've been singing, and Jesus found me. So here's what I want you to do. We're just going to go for 15, 20 minutes this morning. If you've got a Bible, there's some in the pews there.
- Turn to Matthew chapter 9 and verse 9, and this is where we're going to be just for a few moments' time. But let me ask you, as we try and get into this passage this morning, to consider when was the last time you went to a really good party, right?
- And I mean a really good party, that you left and you thought, oh, wasn't that great? People throw all sorts of different parties in our day. I had a wee go at thinking of the parties that I've heard of in our day.
- I've been to a few of these. I won't tell you which. You can guess. But maybe raise your hand if you've been to some of these. We'll start it easy. What about a birthday party? Yeah, a few of us have been to a birthday party. What about an anniversary party? A few of us have been to an anniversary party. Let me just up the temperature slightly.
- [1 : 1 3] Who's been to a royal wedding party? Nobody's been to a royal wedding party. Too embarrassed to admit it. How about this one then? What about a bake-off party? Thane's been to a bake-off party. What about an X-Factor party? These were all the rage a few years ago.
- Some of us. What about a murder mystery party? Yeah, an 80s themed party. What about a Hogmanay party? And let's take it right back to the 90s. What about a roller disco party?
- Do you remember those things? They were great when I was growing up. But let me tell you the one that I'm on the hunt for at the minute with two little girls. The one that my wife and I have our ears to the ground for at the minute are chicken pox parties.
- Can't wait for a chicken pox party. So if you know any children who have the sudden urge to itch, do you give me a call, okay? Chicken pox party. I didn't even know that was a thing until last year, I tell you.
- But here's what I want to do just for a few minutes as we close this service today. I want to tell you about a man in the Bible that we read about who threw a party. He threw a party. Now what kind of party was it?
- [2 : 2 0] Well, come with me to these verses and we'll meet this guy and we'll see what kind of party he threw. This guy is called Matthew. And Matthew lives in and around this little place in the north of Israel called Capernaum.
- And I'll tell you just a little bit about Matthew. Matthew, he's, for starters, he's not a very popular guy. Okay, I think that's probably, actually, it's an understatement really. The truth is that he's hated by the locals.
- Matthew's the kind of guy that gets spat at every time he walks down the street. Matthew's the kind of guy who gets heckled every time he goes to the shops. Matthew's the kind of guy that as soon as he enters a bar, the tumbleweed begins to roll.

This is Matthew. And I'll tell you why he's hated. It's because of what he does for a living. He's a tax collector. You see, in this day, the occupying force in Israel are the Romans.

And what the Romans did to fund their empire is that they collected taxes from the locals. And what they did to collect those taxes, and if you think about this, this is really clever, is that they hired local citizens to do their dirty work for them.

[3 : 29] So when we read about a tax collector in the Bible, we're reading about a Jew who has sold out, as it were, to the Romans. And what he does for a living is that he takes taxes from his own people, and he gives them to the people who are considered the enemy, gives them to the Romans.

And he takes a little slice of the pie for his trouble. So you can imagine if the two defining features of your life are, firstly, that you've sold your soul to the dark side, and then secondly, that you're stinking rich because of that thing, then you can imagine that you are the face on every single person's dark board at home.

Okay, this is Matthew. But one day, Matthew meets Jesus, and everything changes for him. Here is what we read.

This is Matthew chapter 9, verse 9. It reads this, And Jesus went on from there. Okay, so here we are.

It's just an everyday, it's just another day for Matthew. He's going about his everyday business. What's he doing? Do you see it? What's he doing? He's just sitting there. He's just sitting there.

[4 : 44] But this is more than just an eyewitness detail. Remember, this is Matthew himself that's telling us about how he met Jesus. This is more than an eyewitness detail. This is telling us where Matthew's at in life.

Right? He's not standing to attention for Jesus. He's not standing on his tiptoes looking for Jesus. He's just sitting there, not all that interested in Jesus. What's he interested in?

You can imagine, what's he interested in? In his money. Right? He's planning how he's going to spend it. He's counting it up, thinking about that extension he's going to put on the house.

He's thinking about that cruise he's going to go on around the med because I just need a bit of time off. Matthew's not thinking about Jesus. But do you know what? Jesus is thinking about Matthew.

And what happens as Matthew is sitting there, and you can picture it in your minds. Get into this. He's sitting there, and he looks up, and there's this man staring right at him.

[5 : 42] Right? And he thinks to himself, that's this Jesus character I've heard all about. And Jesus doesn't say, hey, Matthew, do you fancy grabbing a coffee, going through Christianity Explored?

He says two words to Matthew. Get this. Not get out. Not be better. Not clean up. He says, verse 9, follow me. Follow me.

Isn't that interesting? Because what this tells us is that Jesus Christ is no surface level saviour. He's not in the business of simply seeing people behave better.

And this is what we've heard from both Pete and Garrett today, that Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, is in the business of holistically transforming lives from the inside out.

Of taking hearts of stone, and by his grace, through the work of the Spirit, giving us a heart of flesh that beats for him. And here he is in pursuit of Matthew's life.

[6 : 43] And even more amazing than that, in response to what Jesus says, Matthew doesn't think about it.

Matthew doesn't weigh it up in his head. Matthew gets up and he follows. Just like that. Isn't that amazing? He just gets up and he follows.

This man, Jesus, speaks and people respond to him. And let's not kid ourselves, this is a massive call for Matthew here. A massive call. Think about it. In one sense, he has got absolutely everything to lose.

I mean, if you're the guy that's got tax collector on your CV, and this one goes belly up, and you have to look for another job, you've got tax collector on your CV. I tell you what, every interview that you go for, do you know what they're going to say?

Listen, don't call us. We'll call you. Because do you know what? Business you used to be in, not a chance. Matthew's giving it all up.

[7 : 42] To follow Jesus. That's in one sense, but in a much greater sense. As Matthew stares this man in the face, there's something about him.

But as Matthew calls, sorry, as Jesus calls, Matthew can't not but say yes. It's as if Jesus has reached into his heart, into the darkness of his heart, and he's flipped on the lights.

And says, let there be light. And for Matthew, his life in this moment, in an instant, is flipped upside down. And that's the story of every single Christian.

That we were not looking for Jesus. But boy, are we glad that he came looking for us. That he cared enough. That he loved me enough to come and seek me out.

And as people told us about him. That's how we heard. This is how we heard. People told us about him. And as we met him, as we read about him in the pages of the Bible, as he stepped off the pages, and he called us to follow him, we could not but say yes.

[8 : 52] That's who this guy is. And maybe you're here today, and Jesus, as you hear him speak from the pages of Scripture, is looking at you in the eye today, and he's saying to you, turn around, come to me.

Follow me. And so Matthew thinks to himself, see if Jesus is interested in a failure like me, if he's interested in what we sang earlier, in a wretch like me.

And do you know what? I've got to introduce him to my mates. I've got to introduce him to my friends. And who are his mates? Who's in his phone book? Who's on his Facebook? Tax collectors and sinners.

I mean, these are the worst of the worst in society. These outcasts, the notorious, the moral messes, the spiritual and religious failures. This is the most motley of crews.

This is who Matthew hangs out with. But what Matthew says to himself is, if Jesus is interested in me, do you know what? I've got to tell my friends. Because he'll be interested in them too. And what he does, if you've been watching Michael McIntyre, this is where I got this idea from, right?

[9 : 58] He gets his phone. And what does he do? He does assent it all. And he says, hey guys, do you know what? Come to mine for dinner tonight. Come to mine for dinner tonight and meet a man who has transformed my life.

And verse 10, here's what goes on. Verse 10, while Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. So what's amazing is that they came to the party, his friends.

But what's even more amazing is that Jesus and his disciples came to the party. So there is Jesus and there he is right there with the shunt of society. There he is listening to them.

There he is chatting with them, eating with them, interested in them, getting up close into their lives and saying, I'm here. I'm here. And do you know what?

He is breaking all sorts of religious and social etiquette here, right? He's not just eating with the wrong hand. What he's doing here is crossing all sorts of religious and social borders that have been put up by people in this society.

[11 : 07] Because in this day, to eat with somebody is more than to associate with them. It's almost to approve of them, to say that you're interested in them. And that's why the Pharisees, the religious leaders of this day, they can't quite get their heads around this.

And did you see how they don't go for Jesus? They go for his disciples. And they say, why does your teacher eat with these people? And verse 11, what would they say?

Why does your teacher eat with these tax collectors and sinners? Well, why does he? I mean, on the one hand, this is so weird, isn't it not? God in the flesh and here he is at this party with these people.

This is so weird. But once you understand who Jesus is, then this is classic Christ. Right? Here he is, involved in people's lives, calling people to leave their life of sin and to repent and come to him and have life.

And explains what he's doing. Do you see it? Using an everyday illustration from the world of medicine. And you don't need to have spent five years at medical school to get this one.

[12 : 16] You don't need to have spent five years playing theme hospital to get this one. You don't need to have spent five years playing operation to get this one. What does he say? Verse 12. It's not the healthy who need a doctor.

But the sick. There it is. Jesus is saying the sick need a doctor. And they'll die if they don't get a doctor.

They'll die if they don't get medical treatment. He's not talking about physical sickness. I'm sure these people, they're wealthy, they're healthy. He's talking about spiritual sickness. And the thing is, we're all sin sick.

Our sin, our rebellion, this is what the guys both said, against God, our creator, the one who made us gloriously in his image. Our sin, our rebellion against him, that we want to go our way, not his way.

That sin, it deserves his judgment. And it means left to ourselves. We are all running a hell-bound race. And we need forgiveness. And we need to be made right with the God who made us.

[13 : 21] And God so loved us that he sent his son, Jesus, who came not just to prescribe the cure, but who came to be the cure for sin-sick sinners like you and like me.

And this great physician would trade places with us as he gives his life on the cross, taking the punishment that our sins deserve on himself, and giving us forgiveness in life as he reaches in to the recesses of our hearts and says, do you know what?

You're mine. You're mine. You see, Jesus isn't saying that it's only the really bad people of the world who are sick and the rest are healthy. This is him outing the Pharisees, these religious teachers who are in the background here.

And every single heart like theirs ever since that refuses to accept the diagnosis that we are sick and it's terminal. And the result of their hardness of heart, they turn down that gracious offer from Jesus to intervene and to save them.

Let me ask you, is that you today? Thinking that it's what's going on on the outside that matters before God rather than what's going on on the inside that God is interested in.

[14 : 37] That's these religious leaders to a T. And Jesus says lovingly to them, chaps, if that's what you think makes you right before God, listen, let me tell you lovingly, you're kidding yourself.

And he says, quoting from Hosea chapter 6, that passage, if you want to check it out in your own time, is where God is rebuking a generation of his people for having immaculate sacrifices, right?

Immaculate by having rotten hearts in the inside. And Jesus is saying to this generation and here, that you're just like that. And God, do you know what?

He desires not your sacrifice. He desires mercy. Desires mercy. Because if you truly had a heart for God, you'd be doing exactly what I'm doing.

You'd be running towards these people who do not know God. You'd be running towards these people who are far from him. And you'd be caring for them. You'd be pleading with them. And you'd be calling them to turn around and to run to the God who offers life, forgiveness, and peace.

[15 : 40] And I think this massively challenges us as a church. It massively challenged me this week as I thought about it to ask myself whether I share Jesus' heart for people. You know, and whether I'm...

Even got that on my radar to pursue people. Meeting them not where I'm at. Meeting them where they're at. With the aim of introducing them to Jesus. It's a big challenge, isn't it?

But this is the kind of saviour that we have. And praise God that that is the case. Because people throw all sorts of parties, don't they? Throw all kinds of parties.

Well, let me ask you the question I asked you at the start. What kind of party is this? What kind of party is this? This is an 80s themed party. Probably not given the date. But what's going on here? What's Matthew throwing?

What title would you give it? Do you know what I'd give it? This is a come and meet Jesus party. It's kind of what's going on this morning, isn't it? And these two are saying to us, listen, come and meet a man.

[16 : 45] Come and let me tell you about a man who's transformed my life. And the thing about this party is that Matthew's still inviting people to it. Because so enthralled was Matthew with Jesus.

Do you know what Jesus called him when he wasn't looking for him? He said, come and be one of my 12 disciples. What an incredible privilege. But Matthew took the time to write a whole book about Jesus. Who he is.

What he did. The people that he met. And why there's simply nobody like him. And why did he write that? He wrote it because he wanted people in the generations to come to pick up Matthew's gospel.

And to come to know Jesus for themselves. And let me ask you, if you're here today, have you ever done that? Was it not fascinating that Garrett said in his story that he researched the facts for himself?

Let me ask you, do you need to go and research the facts? Do you know where you'll find the facts? You'll find the facts here. Matthew's taking the time to write to us so we can know about Jesus.

[17 : 55] The best place to start is to read about them for yourself. Another great place to come, mentioned it earlier, to come to Costa tonight, just around the corner, six o'clock, we'll be thinking about more encounters with people that Jesus had.

And our prayer for everybody that comes into this church, and our prayer for our world, is that people would come to meet him for themselves and they would share in the song that's right at the heart of every single Christian testimony as we sing about Jesus.

And it's this. We sang it earlier. Amazing grace. How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I'm found.

Was blind, but now I see. This is the Jesus who we meet in the Gospels. Let me ask you, do you know him as your saviour and king this morning?

I'm going to pray and then we're going to stand and sing our closing song. But just as we pray, why don't we take just 30 seconds or so and let's just be quiet as we respond to everything that's gone on this morning.

[18 : 59] And then I'll close in prayer. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for today.

And this service that has helped us re-grasp that truth and to celebrate it, that you are the God who is in the business of transforming lives.

And so, Father, I pray that you would help us this week as we continue to think on these things to glory in the person of your son, Jesus Christ. And it's in his wonderful name that we pray.

Amen. Amen.