

## Jesus Loved to Party!

Hosea 6:1–6 • Matthew 9:9–17

**Hos. 6:1** “Come, let us return to the LORD.  
He has torn us to pieces  
but he will heal us;  
he has injured us  
but he will bind up our wounds.

**Hos. 6:2** After two days he will revive us;  
on the third day he will restore us,  
that we may live in his presence.

**Hos. 6:3** Let us acknowledge the LORD;  
let us press on to acknowledge him.  
As surely as the sun rises,  
he will appear;  
he will come to us like the winter rains,  
like the spring rains that water the earth.”

**Hos. 6:4** “What can I do with you, Ephraim?  
What can I do with you, Judah?  
Your love is like the morning mist,  
like the early dew that disappears.

**Hos. 6:5** Therefore I cut you in pieces with my prophets,  
I killed you with the words of my mouth;  
my judgments flashed like lightning upon you.

**Hos. 6:6** For I desire mercy, not sacrifice,  
and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.

**Matt. 9:9** As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector’s booth. “Follow me,” he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

**Matt. 9:10** While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house, many tax collectors and “sinners” came and ate with him and his disciples. **11** When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and ‘sinners?’”

**Matt. 9:12** On hearing this, Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. **13** But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

**Matt. 9:14** Then John’s disciples came and asked him, “How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?”

**Matt. 9:15** Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.

**Matt. 9:16** "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. **17** Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."

I want you to turn to someone near you and say, "I'm really glad you're here."

[Pause while people are saying these things.]

Now I want you to turn to someone else and ask, "Has Doug lost his mind?"

[Pause while people are saying these things.]

Are you laughing yet? Did you know that Jesus was accused of having too much fun? It's true! In fact, more than once, Jesus was accused of being a party animal. Over and over again, Jesus is found hanging out at different people's houses. Jesus loved to party!

Because Jesus loved to party, I would like you to take a moment and think about parties. What's one of your favorite parties that you've ever been part of? Find someone close to you, and share three things that made that party memorable.

[Let people have a minute to talk it over.]

Okay? Oh my gosh! I expect there are a lot of stories out there, but I expect all our parties have some things in common. What are some of the things you find at all the best parties?

[Take responses from the congregation.]

Food — Of course! And it has to be great food, right? Did you know that God loves barbecue? For real! That's why the Jews were commanded to have burnt offerings—they were roasting the lambs or bulls or whatever! And then after, they would bring the food out and everyone would share it. It was a party and God was the host!

People tell jokes and outrageous things happen — Jesus went to parties all the time. "Why?" Leonard Sweet asks, in his hilariously titled book, *The Bad Habits of Jesus*. "Because Jesus was the life of every party. So much so that less-than-kosher people often hosted VIP events for him, causing the religious establishment to label him a party animal." And we see these things in our passage today.

Music — When you're at a really great party, there's music. Sometimes people are feeling the music and the joy and they start dancing! A few years ago, my niece Kendall married Zack, and the music at their reception was great. You want to know my favorite part? It was

watching my eighty-one-year old Dad and my seventy-nine-year old Aunt Betsey—3 artificial hips and two artificial knees between them—cutting the rug together! Oooo could they dance! It was the best!

When Jesus talks about the Kingdom of Heaven, He says, “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a wedding party!” When someone comes back to God after being away a while, Jesus doesn’t look to see if the roof fell in, doesn’t tease them about “long-time-no see”—so please don’t do those things. Jesus is just glad to see them and throws a party! That’s what heaven is like!

What does a Jesus party look like? I’d like to tell you a story. It’s originally told by Tony Campolo, a Professor of Sociology at Eastern College in Philadelphia. He is one of the most unusual people you’ll ever meet. Many years ago, I heard him tell this story, and I found it on YouTube, but it’s too long there, so I shortened it. I’m going to tell it like he does, in the first person, but it’s really Tony Campolo talking. He says:

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I *had* to go on a speaking engagement to Honolulu. (laughs) Hey, sometimes you get Chicago, sometimes you get Honolulu. You go to Honolulu and you wake up at 3 in the morning if you’re from the East Coast because of the time difference...and I was hungry. So I went looking for something to eat, and up a side street I found a greasy spoon diner. I went in. There were no booths, just a row of stools in front of the counter. I sat down—there was nobody in the place. I didn’t touch the menu. It was one of those plastic menus you know, and grease had piled up on it. I knew that if I opened it, something extra-terrestrial would have crawled out.

This fat guy with a greasy apron, unshaved, with a cigar comes out. He puts the cigar down and asks, “What do you want?”

“A cup of coffee and a doughnut?” He poured the coffee and then he did this [wipes off his hand on his chest], and he picked up the doughnut. I hate that!

So I’m sitting there, 3:30 in the morning, munching on my dirty doughnut, when into the place come about 10 or 11 prostitutes and they sat on either side of me...and it was a small place! And I tried to disappear.

The one next to me was especially boisterous, and she said to her friend, “Tomorrow’s my birthday. I’m going to be 39.”

Her friend sneered, “So what do you want me to do? Sing Happy Birthday? So you’re going to be 39—you want a cake, you want a party?”

The first woman said, “Look I don’t want anything. I’m just telling you it’s my birthday. Why do you have to hurt my feelings?” And then she added, “I’ve never had a birthday party in my whole life. I don’t expect to have one now.”

That did it. I waited until they left. Then I called Harry over.

I said, “Do they come in here every night?”

He said, “Yeah.”

I said, “The one right next to me...”

He said, “Agnes!”

I said, “It’s her birthday tomorrow, Harry. What do you say we decorate this place and when she comes in tomorrow night, we have a little party for her. She’s never had a party in her whole life.”

He grabbed my hand and squeezed it and said, “Mister, that’s beautiful! Beautiful! Hey Janet! Come out here. This guy wants to throw a birthday party for Agnes! It’s her birthday tomorrow.”

Janet came out and she said, "Oh mister, that's brilliant. Nobody ever does anything for Agnes, and she's one of the good people in this town. I know, I know what she does to make money, but she's a good person, really kind to everyone."

I said, "Can I decorate the place?"

She said, "To your hearts content."

I said, "I'm going to get a great, big, birthday cake..."

Harry said, "Oh no the cake's my thing." [Hand wipe on the apron.]

I thought, "Oh geez!"

So I got there the next morning at about 2:30. I had bought this crepe paper at K-Mart. Strung it across the place. Made a big sign that said, "Happy Birthday, Agnes!" and put it up on the mirror behind the counter. I had the place spruced. It was ready.

Janet, who did the cooking, had gotten the word out on the street. By 3:15, every single prostitute in Honolulu was squeezed into this diner. It was wall-to-wall prostitutes...and me!

Three-thirty in the morning, the door opens, and in comes Agnes and her friends. I've got everybody set, everybody ready, and as they come in the door, everybody yells, "Happy Birthday, Agnes!" I've never seen anybody so stunned in my life. Her knees buckled...they steadied her...and got her down on the stool, and we started singing, "Happy Birthday, happy birthday, happy birthday, dear Agnes." When they brought out the cake with all the candles lit, that was it—that's when she lost it and started to cry.

Harry just stood there with the cake, with all the candles. "Knock it off! Come on, Agnes, knock it off and blow out the candles. Come on, blow out the candles!" She tried, but she couldn't do it...so he blew out the candles.

He gave her the knife and said, "Alright, Agnes, now cut the cake. Cut the cake. Cut the cake."

She sat for a long moment and then she turned to me. She said, "Mister, I really don't want to cut the cake. Is it alright if I don't want to cut the cake?"

I said, "It's your cake. It's your cake, you can do with it what you want."

"I want to take it home I want to show it to my mother. Is that ok?"

"Sure," I said.

She stood up.

I said, "Do you have to do it now?"

"I live two doors down. Let me take the cake to her and I promise I'll bring it right back. I promise."

She picked up the cake like it was the holy grail. She pushed her way through the crowd and out the door.

And as the door swung slowly shut, there was dead silence. You talk about an awkward silence. All of us were standing there, stunned. I didn't know what to say, so I finally said, "What do you say...what do you say...we...pray." It's weird looking back at it now—a sociologist leading a prayer meeting with a bunch of prostitutes in a diner at 3:30 in the morning... It was the right thing to do.

I prayed that God would deliver her from what filthy men had done to her, probably starting when she was too young to know what was going on. That's how these things start, you know, some kid—11, 12 years old—gets messed over by some filthy slob, and her self-image is destroyed and she's ruined, and we blame her when we ought to be blaming *him*. And I prayed that God would make her new, because we are here to declare Good News that no matter where you've been or what you've done Jesus can make you new.

When I finished the prayer, Harry leaned across the counter. He said, "Hey Campolo! You told us you were a sociologist. You're not a sociologist...you're a preacher. What kind of church do you preach in?"

In one of those moments when you come up with just the right words, I said, "I preach in a church that throws birthday parties for [prostitutes] at 3:30 in the morning."

"No, you don't. No, you don't. (pause) I would join a church like that."

Wouldn't we all? Wouldn't we all love to belong to a church that threw birthday parties for [prostitutes] at 3:30 in the morning? I got news for you. I got news for you. *That* is the kind of church that Jesus came to create. I don't know where we got this other one that's half country club. Jesus came to create a people that would bring parties to those who have no parties, celebrations into the lives of those who have nothing to celebrate.<sup>1</sup>

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Jesus brought us here today to this beautiful spot—not to make us feel bad about ourselves, but to get us out of the grind of our lives. In the middle of our darkened world Jesus brought us here to give us some Good News—that we can be new again, whatever we have done, wherever we have been, whatever haunts us—that we can be new again in Jesus. Jesus brought us here today, hoping we would pick up this "bad" habit—and bring God's abundant life to the party. Jesus partied with the not-so-nice and they would follow Him anywhere. What about you? The party's for you...and me...and Jesus is waiting.

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<sup>1</sup>Here's the link to the YouTube of Tony telling this story himself.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kWIMV-UmueM>

Photo of Tony Campolo at a conference in Hawaii, about the time of this story.

