

Jesus Changes Everything for a Sinful Woman

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[0 : 00] because you've your grace towards us in the Lord Jesus. So please help us as we come to your word now. Speak to us, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. So let's read together now from Luke chapter 7 and verse 36 to verse 50.

When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house.

So she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is, that she is a sinner. Jesus answered him, Simon, I have something to tell you.

Tell me, teacher, he said. Two people owed money to a certain money lender. One owed him 500 denarii and the other 50. Neither of them had the money to pay him back. So he forgave the debts of both.

[1 : 11] Now, which of them will love him more? Simon replied, I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven. You have judged correctly, Jesus said. Then he turned towards the woman and said to Simon, Do you see this woman? I came into your house.

You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss. But this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.

Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven, as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little, loves little. Then Jesus said to her, Your sins are forgiven.

The other guests began to say among themselves, Who is this who even forgives sins? Jesus said to the woman, Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.

So, again, Jesus changes everything, this time for a sinful woman. This is the story of a public scandal.

[2 : 15] Now, picture this as we begin. Imagine, it's sitting in a church. All is quiet. We're ready for worship. And in comes someone guilty of public sin, some kind of scandal.

Maybe that's a football club owner from one of the big six, or perhaps it's a drug addict. Maybe it's a well-known celebrity who has fallen into disfavour.

Perhaps it's a former prison convict. Well, when that moment comes, what do we do? What would the grace of God have us do?

I imagine that kind of situation might expose some of the things going on in our hearts. It might create a measure of discomfort for us.

But it would be also, wouldn't it, an opportunity to demonstrate love and grace and kindness and a welcome in the name of Jesus. Well, when we think about the life of Jesus, we recognise that he often shocked others.

[3 : 23] In particular, with regards to the people that he welcomed. And this event that we've just read is perhaps one of the biggest scandals of all when it comes to the life of Jesus.

So we're going to look at this wonderful story. We're going to draw some lessons from our three main characters so that together we might see how Jesus and his grace changes everything that's true for this woman.

And may it be true for each one of us today, whoever we are. So the story, let's begin with the story, which is really the story of the scandal of God's grace.

So first of all, let's think about the setting in verse 36. One of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him and he's at the Pharisees' house reclining at the table.

So think of a black tie event in our day. There's the great and the good are gathered together.

There's nice food, there's polite, intelligent conversation. Might get us into the mood for what would be known in Jesus' day as a Roman symposium.

[4 : 23] So those invited would be gathered together around low tables. They'd be leaning on one shoulder eating with the other. They'd be facing the table. Their legs would be out behind them and the guests would be reclining and they'd be sharing their wisdom.

But within the house, the public could sort of be on the edges and they could listen in as a way to try and gain some wisdom and insight. And the guest list was Simon, the Pharisee.

He would, without question, have invited other religious leaders. He would have invited those who were at the top of the social ladder. Their whole system was based on being separate from those that they considered other than them.

So we'd have been very like-minded people. But then there's Jesus. Now Jesus is an invited guest of Simon, but, and this is important, he's not the guest of honour.

He's a guest who is not treated with honour, as we see. So the guests are there, the crowd have gathered. They want to gain wisdom. And Jesus, what does Jesus do?

[5 : 23] He uses this whole experience to teach an unforgettable lesson on God's grace and the forgiveness that he has come to bring. And that takes us to the scandal of verses 37 to 39.

You can almost picture at the table, mouths dropping, people stopping mid-chew, conversations stopping mid-sentence.

And maybe around the room, the muttering, the pointing, the shock, the anger from some, the embarrassment of others. As this notorious woman, this public sinner enters and she crashes the party, not just by being there, but in the actions that she takes.

Here is a woman who is overwhelmed by a sense of love and gratitude for Jesus. And so she wants to honour Jesus. So she stands behind him and she's got this jar of perfume to anoint his feet.

She wants to serve him to wash his feet and there's weeping and she's wiping his feet and she's kissing his feet.

[6 : 34] This is a shocking scene. I didn't know this, but in Jesus' day and culture, for a woman to undo her hair and to let it down in public was considered grounds for divorce.

Such was the scandal. But this woman, she ignores the stares, she ignores the hostility and the shock to honour Jesus. Now, of course, Simon, he is shocked.

Verse 39, when the Pharisees saw this, he said, if this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is, that she's a sinner. He's respectable. Presumes Jesus is not from God because he doesn't simply move away and reject the woman.

Simon's thinking is significant. She is a sinner. By implication, Simon doesn't think I'm a sinner. He thinks he belongs in some other category. And that leads Jesus to tell his story, a story that kind of explodes that myth for Simon.

It's a very simple and a very direct story in verses 40 to 43. But, you know, there's a shock implied even in who the lesson is addressed. Here is Simon, the teacher.

[7 : 42] But it's he who needs a lesson, not the woman. It's he, Simon, who's out of step with God in his grace, not this woman. So Jesus tells the story. To put it in our own terminology, we can imagine a payday loans company or a loan shark.

And two people fall on hard times and they become customers of this payday loans company. One borrows 50 days wages. The other borrows 500 days wages.

Well, it comes the end of the month. The loan shark comes to collect the debt. But actually he doesn't. That's what we would expect. But he doesn't come to collect the debt.

He comes to cancel the debt. And Jesus asks the question, which of them would love him more?

Little debt or great debt? And Simon, of course, is correct when he says the one who had the bigger debt forgiven will have greater love.

Imagine, imagine how despair would turn to hope. How sorrow would turn to joy. How stress would turn to peace. And, you know, there's a sting in the tail as Jesus tells the story to Simon.

[8 : 45] He says, Simon, you're right in theory, but you are wrong in practice. And that's why verses 44 to 50 is kind of the twist in the whole story.

Tim Chester has written a really interesting book, helpful book called Meals with Jesus. And one of the things he points out is that Simon, at one and the same time, is the host, but not the host. Because he fails to honour Jesus.

Whereas the woman, she actually is the host, but she's not even the guest. Because she honours, she loves, she anoints, she serves Jesus. The woman, verse 47, is the one with the great debt. I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven as her great love has shown. Jesus has dealt with her great debt. He has cancelled that debt.

He has the power to forgive as the son of God. And as a response to that forgiveness and salvation, to that grace, the woman shows great love in honouring Jesus. Whereas Simon, by implication, well, Simon is the little debt guy.

[9 : 53] As he might well think of himself as the no debt guy. He's a little sinner. With the result that he has no love for Jesus, no honour for Jesus. He sees no need in his life for Jesus.

And again, think about the twist in the story of this woman. So she's used to being talked about publicly. Being abused publicly.

Being insulted. Being subject to whispering campaigns. But Jesus, what does Jesus say publicly of her? Your sins are forgiven.

Your faith is saved. You go in peace. Here is to use JC Royal's language. A public and authoritative declaration of forgiveness. Jesus pronounces grace and peace on this woman.

In this account three times, the lady is described as a sinner. First of all, in Simon's thinking in verse 39.

[10 : 59] And then in Jesus' own words in verse 47. Her many sins have been forgiven. And then as the guests begin to discuss, who is this who even forgives sins? She is a sinner.

Three times also, Jesus is shown to be the one who forgives. Your sins are forgiven. And the guests recognise he forgives sins. And Jesus said her faith has saved her.

Her many sins, verse 47, have been forgiven. Now, how good is the good news? We asked that question last week. How good is the good news? Here is the good news. Jesus is a friend of sinners.

And that's to his honour. This is a badge of honour that Jesus would wear. That he has come for the weak and the helpless and the guilty. The despised, the rejected, the abused. And Jesus publicly defends and honours and welcomes.

And this, this is the scandal of God's grace. This is the amazing grace John Newton was singing about. Think about John Newton's story when he sang that God by his grace saved a wretch like me.

[12 : 04] Here was a slave owner who was very violent, who was very hostile to God. But he was dramatically changed. Now, again, to ask the question, do you and I really believe this?

Do we believe this can happen in people's lives? Do we believe how powerful and how transforming God's grace is? Imagine if we really believed that, how that would transform us.

And how that would shape our life and mission as a church. So to dig a little bit deeper into God's grace. Let's use these three characters, as it were, to take a look in the mirror.

Let's think, first of all, about Simon the Pharisee. Someone who is lacking in grace. I think Simon stands as a warning to us. Especially those of us who are in church.

It's a time for us to examine our hearts. How am I like graceless Simon? Three ways we can think about this warning. Think about a warning to insiders.

[13 : 07] So I read an article from a Pakistani academic. Obviously deeply frustrated in his institution. He was angry at the reality of jobs for the boys.

Jobs for friends. At the expense of others. Recognising that there are some who are insiders. But then there are others who are outsiders. Where your face doesn't fit.

So there's no seat at the table. For you no power or influence. And Simon, when we think about it in religious terms. Simon was a so-called insider who excluded others.

Part of that group. The Pharisees who were the separate ones. Who had that holier than thou attitude. So they felt they could be full of pride. And they could sort of reject and be down on others. That kind of mentality. Don't value God's grace. Don't extend it to others. So we need to be very careful. If we are on the inside as it were.

[14 : 09] Of having a cold heart to God's grace. And also to be closed to Jesus and his mission. By being closed to other people. I think here too there is a warning about respectable religion.

Because Simon, he presumed his kind. They were okay with God. At worst he was a little sinner. He had a high view of self.

And a low view of sin. He imagined he could earn his salvation. Earn his acceptance from God. And Jesus comes and he explodes that lie.

With his parable. Because what's the point of the parable? Yes the debts were different. But both have a debt. That cannot be paid back. Therefore both should have love and gratitude.

And both stand in need of grace. So we need to beware. So we need to beware. Of what we might call the merit mindset.

[15:14] That thinks when it comes to faith. Either I have to do certain things to become a Christian. Or to keep in God's favour.

To keep in God's good books. That's up to me and my performance. And that kind of merit mindset is really a recipe for pride on the one hand. Or despair on the other.

And it's out of line with the gospel. Because the gospel speaks of grace from beginning to end. The gospel is grace from A to Z. In our Christian lives.

So we need to beware of that sort of respectable religion. That thinks it's about merit and not grace. And we also need to beware of barriers. Have you ever felt.

I'm sure we've all felt this at different times. Think of a situation where you feel like you just stick out like a sore thumb. As I was thinking about that. I was thinking about a time in Glasgow where I went with some Chinese friends to a traditional hot pot restaurant.

[16:19] First time I'd ever been there. Didn't understand the menu. Didn't recognise the ingredients. Didn't know what the process was.

Felt really awkward and uncomfortable. Not our scene. Not our culture. Not our language. We need to recognise. For some people.

Churches like that. And so we must be careful. To not put barriers in the way. Thinking back to my hot pot restaurant.

I was so glad of friends who could translate. Who could walk me through the steps. Who could make me feel comfortable. And that's one of the things that we need to do for our friends as we bring them to church.

Try and ease some of that discomfort. I feel like I don't belong here. We must be careful in the way that we talk. Jesus in verse 44 asks a really interesting question of Simon.

[17:23] Simon, do you see this woman? The truth is, Simon didn't. What did Simon see? He saw her reputation.

He saw her past. He saw her scandal. He couldn't and he wouldn't see what grace and love and forgiveness from God in Jesus would do to transform her. There's a great big barrier that he would have put up.

Now as a church, we must be so careful that our practices and our attitudes don't put up barriers to stop others from meeting with Jesus. And as individual Christians, we must never forget that it's only by grace that we are saved, as we thought about from Ephesians 2.

And to recognise that God's grace is mighty to save. So we wouldn't on the one hand limit Jesus, nor would we make judgment to say, well, Jesus can't or won't save that type of person.

So those are some lessons we can learn from Simon. What about this sinful woman, this lady who's changed by grace? There is in her story a beautiful story of hope and of redemption, isn't there?

[18:32] So again, as we use this story to look in the mirror, to think about our own lives, how am I like this woman? What can I learn from her story? Let's think, first of all, about forgiveness.

So at some previous point in her life, it's evident that she has heard Jesus and his teaching.

Perhaps she has met with Jesus. We're not clear on that, but what's clear is that from her past life, she has this load of sin and guilt and shame, and it's very public.

But Jesus has met her with grace. Jesus took that load of sin and he has exchanged it for his forgiveness.

And that's transformed her. Now, it's so important for us to recognise Jesus doesn't pretend when it comes to sin. In verse 47, he talks about her many sins.

One thing that Jesus would do by the Spirit is he would expose to us our sin so that we would be aware of our needs. But those many sins and those great sins, perhaps that you have in your life, I have in my life, there's no barrier to God's grace that forgives.

[19 : 51] To quote from an old hymn, the vilest offender, the worst sinner who truly believed that moment, the moment we have faith, from Jesus a pardon receives.

Or a modern hymn we often sing in church, our sins, they are many, but his mercy is more. I wonder when you see and hear of this woman, you feel like, this is me.

Do you feel that you're hiding in the shadows, you're loaded down by sin and guilt and shame, that others would talk about you because of things that have happened in your past?

Well, here's an invitation from Jesus to come into the light, to recognise that by looking to Jesus and trusting him, Jesus will forgive you. And as you think about the people that you know, perhaps who feel sort of loaded down with guilt, shame, their past, as such a hold on them, pray for them, pray for your family, pray for your friends to find the grace of forgiveness.

So we see that in the light, we also see faith. Three elements of her faith we can see. First of all, her boldness. Imagine the courage it would have taken for her to disrupt this, this posh dinner party, to express her honour and her love.

[21 : 11] Here's a recognition that forgiveness frees us from shame. She's too busy thinking about Jesus, too busy recognising his love to care about the stares, to care about the insults, to care about being despised.

She's got a boldness to her faith, but there's also a humility to her faith. Because what role does she take? She takes the servant's role, doesn't she, in foot washing. Usually people's heads were anointed.

She doesn't feel worthy of that, perhaps, so she anoints his feet. She's humble before her king.

Again, to borrow from another hymn, Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to your cross I cling, are words that she would have echoed.

Faith is humble, recognising we are dependent. All that we have is a gift of grace. But there's also gratitude. There's lovely demonstrations that there is no price too high for this woman to honour and to show her love.

So there's the perfume, which would have been expensive, but there's also her not caring about her public opinion and reputation in order to show her honour. Love leads to worship.

[22 : 21] To quote again from John Newton, She knew, I am a great sinner. Jesus is a great saviour. And in that regards, worship just makes sense.

Again, what if we really believed this? Imagine how that would change our worship. There'd be no half-hearted worship in our public times together in church or in our private devotions.

So again, may God's grace change us as we come to value forgiveness and we come to exercise faith in him. And let's finish by thinking about Jesus.

In Jesus, we see that God's grace changes everything. Here is Jesus that figured out the heart of this scandal, this public scandal, because he extends his grace. He extends his grace by identifying with this woman.

What would Simon have done? Simon would have excluded her, pushed her away, abused her. But Jesus is so different. He smashes down those cultural barriers, those religious barriers, that separation.

[23 : 24] He honours the dishonourable with his grace. The author of the Hebrews says powerfully to us as Christians, Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers.

Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters. He ties himself to us, such is his love for us. That's the pattern of Jesus.

And that establishes a model and a pattern for his church. We are to welcome. We are to honour. We are to be those who truly see people.

See beyond the masks that people wear. See beyond the shame, the scandal, the baggage that people bring so that we might honour and extend grace as God in Christ has given grace to us.

And then let's think about the mission of Jesus. It's so notable, isn't it, when you look at the Gospels, how often Jesus goes to the margins of society. Luke especially draws attention to that.

[24 : 27] Jesus, the friend of sinners, has compassion for the weak, for the excluded, for the vulnerable. And again, isn't that a challenge for us as a church, as Christians? We often, I imagine, if you're like me, we live within the comfort zones.

But Jesus would keep sending us out and would have us keep drawing others in. Which takes us to the gift of Jesus.

He's come to give grace, to extend grace. The story ends with Jesus highlighting his grace. In verse 48, he said, to your sins are forgiven. There's forgiveness.

Jesus so closely identifies with sin, with sinners that he has come to bear our sin, to pay the price for our sin, to die the death that we deserve, to bear the punishment that should be ours, so that we might be forgiven.

That's not something we deserve. That's something we freely receive as a gift by faith that looks and trusts in Jesus. And then, Jesus says in verse 50, your faith has saved you.

[25 : 33] He talks about salvation. What has Jesus come to do? He's come to destroy the grip, the stranglehold of sin and shame leading to death in our lives. He has come to set us free, to enjoy life with God.

In God's family, we are saved from sin to be God's people, to live obedient, holy lives that involves suffering and joy.

And again, that's not something we earn or deserve. That's something that comes as a gift of God's grace we receive by faith. And Jesus says to her, finally in verse 50, go in peace.

Peace. She's been restored to wholeness, to life of blessing under God from God, with God, because Jesus has come to be the peace offering, to reconcile us.

By nature, God is hostile to us because of our sin and we are hostile towards God because of our sin. we are going in the opposite direction but Jesus comes to reconcile and to restore.

[26 : 41] In Jesus, we discover then that by God's grace, he would change everything in a person's life. Go back to where we began. Think about that church service.

Think about that notorious person walking into the building. What do we do? Well, may God help us to be like Jesus, to extend a gracious welcome, to show honour so that we might invite fellow sinners to know the transforming power of God's love and God's grace.

Let's pray. Lord our God, we are so thankful for this story and for this reminder of your grace that welcomes, your grace that forgives, your grace that reconciles, your grace that brings peace.

Lord, we pray to receive that, that that would change our hearts, it would lead us to love and gratitude and worship and giving ourselves for the sake of Jesus, that it would break down barriers of apathy or hostility.

Lord, may each one of us be captured by the wonder of the grace of God that we see in Jesus and at the cross of Jesus so our lives will be totally transformed.

[28 : 17] We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Now we'll close by singing. We'll sing Love Divine, All Love's Excelling and How Firm a Foundation and the first five verses of Psalm 25.

Love Divine, Love Divine, All Love's Excelling Joy of Hell to earth come down Fix in us Thy humble dwelling All Thy faithful mercies crown Jesus, Thou art all compassion Pure, Unbounded, Love Thou art Visit us With Thy salvation Enter every trembling heart

Let us all in Thee inherit Let us find that second rest Take away the love of sinning Alpha and Omega B End of faith As its beginning set Our hearts at liberty Come Almighty

Come Almighty To deliver Let us all Thy life receive Suddenly return And never, nevermore Thy temples leave Thee we would be always blessing Serve He as Thy horse above Pray and praise

Thee without ceasing Glory in Thy perfect love Glory in Thy perfect love Glory in Thy perfect love Finish then Thy new creation Thy new creation Pure and spotless let us be Let us see Thy great salvation

Thy great salvation Pure and spotless let us be Let us see Thy great salvation Let us see Thy great salvation Perfectly restored Perfectly restored in Thee Changed from glory In to glory Till in Him we

take our place Till we cast our crowns Till we cast our crowns Before Thee lost in wonder Love and praise Feel To be hologram To be With his foundation you saints of the Lord is laid for your faith in

his excellent word what more can he say than to you he has said to you for refuge to Jesus have fled fear not I am with you hope be not dismayed for I am your God and will still give you weight

[33 : 43] I'll strengthen you help you and cause you to stand upheld by my gracious omnipotent hand when through the deep waters I call you to go the rivers of sorrow shall not overflow for I will

be with you your trouble to bless and sanctify to you your deepest distress when through fiery trials your pathway shall lie my grace all sufficient shall be your supply the flame shall not harm you I only

desire your dross to consume and your gold to refine you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you and you you you to you you or you

When evildoers threaten me to take my life away, My adversaries and my foes will stumble in that day.

Although an army hands me in, my heart will feel no dread.

Though war against me should arise, I will lift up my head.

One thing I plead before the Lord, and there shall seek always, That I may come within God's house and dwell there all my days, That on the beauty of the Lord I constantly may gaze, And in his house may seek to know direction in his ways.

[37 : 19] For in his dwelling he will keep me safe in troubled days, Within his tent he'll shelter me, and on a rock me raise.

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