

Sins forgiven

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Preacher: Jerome Peirson

[0 : 00] And I wanted to look in Luke chapter 7 verses 36 to 50.

! And in the church Bible, if you've got the church Bible, I think that's on page 1036. 1036. 1036. So that's Luke chapter 7 verse 36.

A well-known portion. The heading in my Bible says, A Sinful Woman Forgiven.

Let's hear the word of God. One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. And behold, a woman of the city who was a sinner. When she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, bought an alabaster flask of ointment. And standing behind him at his feet, weeping.

[1 : 07] She began to wet his feet with her tears. And wiped them with the hair of her head. And kissed his feet. And anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is.

And who is touching him, for she is a sinner. And Jesus answering said to him, Simon, I have something to say to you. And he answered, Say it, teacher.

A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii. And the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?

Simon answered, The one I suppose for whom he cancelled the largest debt. And he said to him, You have judged rightly. Then, turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, Do you see this woman?

I entered your house. You gave me no water for my feet. But she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss.

[2 : 21] But from the time I came in, she had not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil. But she has anointed my feet with ointment.

Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven. For she loved much, but he who is forgiven little, loves little.

And he said to her, Your sins are forgiven. Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, Who is this who even forgives sins?

And he said to the woman, Your faith has saved you. Go in peace. And may God add his blessing to the reading of his holy and infallible word.

We'll sing another song. So let's stand and we will sing All My Days. How is your love for the Lord Jesus?

[3 : 23] I'm not asking you if you love to learn about him through a system of doctrine. I'm not asking you whether you love to know certain facts about the Lord Jesus.

Those things are certainly very important. And we certainly encourage that here at Calvary. But the question is, do you love the Lord Jesus?

If you recall in the Gospel of John, in that last chapter in John, after Peter was reinstated, Jesus asked him three times, Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me?

It's a fundamental question. And it's a fundamental marker of what it means to be a Christian.

At the end of the day, we can ask lots of questions to define and determine and discern what it means to be a Christian. But the Bible speaks much of the importance of our love for the Lord Jesus Christ.

[4 : 32] In many places, we see in many passages how we are instructed and encouraged to think about and consider our love for the Lord Jesus Christ.

And I thought as we come to communion, it's a helpful thing to do is to examine ourselves. Not to discourage, but to encourage. And this portion is a really helpful and beautiful portion of Scripture

where we see love for Christ displayed from this woman.

So I want to tonight, just to simply in a kind of very straightforward way, to consider two people in this portion of Scripture for our meditation.

Obviously, there's three people in this portion, but I want us to consider the Pharisee called Simon. And I want us to consider this woman who is nameless.

Of course, there's Jesus Christ in this passage, but we'll see his work woven in throughout, hopefully. Well, let's start by thinking about Simon, the Pharisee.

[5 : 40] He asked Jesus to come and eat with him. Eating in those times was a really significant thing.

It was a mark of fellowship. He'd invited him into his home. It says in the text that Jesus reclined at his table. This certainly would have been a place for Jesus to have a place of prominence in his home.

It was no small thing that Jesus was invited in to partake in a meal and to have fellowship with this Pharisee. He clearly respected Jesus.

Later on in the text, he calls Jesus teacher. So there's a level of honour and respect for who Jesus is. In those times when an important person had a dinner and invited guests, what tended to happen was members of the public would come.

And although they wouldn't necessarily be sitting around or lying around, more accurately, the table, they would possibly be surrounding the venue where the meal was happening, almost like onlookers or spectators.

[6 : 51] They'd stand on the side. And it wasn't so much a private affair like we would have a meal and invite friends around. It was certainly more of a kind of public affair where people could come and watch and see what was going on.

And if a renowned rabbi was speaking, members of the public would attend the meal to hear and to see the wisdom of that rabbi.

And that's most likely what's going on here. After inviting Jesus into his home and after seeing the significant act of this woman, he questioned whether Jesus was a prophet.

In verse 39, he questions him. And here we get a sense of his thoughts about Jesus. He didn't say it out loud. If you look at the text, he said he thought.

Verse 39. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, if this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is.

[7 : 57] The Pharisee had an inability to see the change that was occurring in this woman. He had an inability to see who she was and who she had become.

He had a skewed view of what a prophet is. Despite his outward show of welcome and inviting him into his home, inwardly, he had a disapproving spirit, didn't he?

He had a doubting heart. There's a sense in the text of almost an incomprehension. And some may say even a contempt for Jesus and his show of mercy towards a poor sinner.

He questions Jesus' piety and he doesn't truly understand who he is. Now in his thoughts, he clearly holds a view that this woman, she's not worthy of Jesus' attention.

And he felt that Jesus was unable to see the sinfulness of this woman. So here we get a censorious, judgmental type of spirit coming from this Pharisee.

[9 : 16] Now although he hadn't done anything outwardly wrong, he had not gone beyond the essential duty of inviting Jesus into the home.

That was good. But he did the bare minimum as a host. He gave no water to clean Jesus' feet. He did not greet Jesus with a kiss.

He did not anoint Jesus' head with oil. So this Pharisee, Simon, he was okay being around Jesus. He had a kind of outward way of showing civility and respect for Jesus.

But there was no show of devotion. There was no show of love. There was no affection in his welcome for Jesus.

He was happy to have him in the house. And he displays a kind of civility, a kind of formality. There is such a thing as a kind of outward, empty, formal religion.

[10 : 20] A kind of going through the motions, a civility, a turning up. A kind of coldness. As a Pharisee, no doubt he would have believed himself to be a man of status.

A man of privilege, prestige and honour. He was one of the religious elites. He was a religious professional.

No doubt he would have been well versed in the law. He was a theological conservative. He was someone who would discuss and debate the finer points of theology.

He would debate the application of the law to the point of being fastidious. But he didn't show godly sorrow for his sins or gratitude for Jesus.

In verse 43, when Jesus spoke the parable to him and then asked him who would love the moneylender more, Simon was begrudging in his response.

[11 : 25] If you look in 43, verse 43. Simon answered, The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.

There's a reluctance. There's a begrudging kind of spirit there. He would have known and realised what the parable was about and who it was pointing to.

When Jesus addresses Simon in verse 44, he says, Do you see this woman? But he hadn't been able to truly see this woman for who she was.

He hadn't been able to see the heart of the matter and who she had become and how she had been delivered from being the person she was. Jesus is the ultimate and true prophet because he was able to see.

He saw Simon's heart and he knew his thoughts. So as we think about Simon the Pharisee, I think it is helpful to think, what about us?

[12 : 28] Can our religion at times take on a cold formality? Can we go through the motions?

Can we look begrudgingly at those that we see as beyond the pale when they're brought into the kingdom? I was challenged by that.

Let's consider the woman for a moment. She was someone of little status. A woman in that society would have had no social standing or privilege.

She was probably extremely low on the social pecking order. She was a sinner. Now, often when we hear a sinner, there's a sense in which we all say we're sinners.

It's a great leveler, isn't it? We have all sinned. But here, when it says she was a sinner, there's something more going on here. Her renown, her reputation, her lifestyle was characterized by sin.

[13 : 34] This was someone who was reputed to be a sinner. And her identity was shaped by sinfulness. It's possible. It doesn't say, but it's possible she was either a prostitute or an adulteress.

She was more akin to someone who had led a life that was beyond what was acceptable and desirable among religious folk in Israel. That she was outside of the covenant promises and blessings.

She was someone who was cast out. She was seen as utterly unworthy and beyond. And salvation. Now, she wouldn't have been someone that was invited in as a guest.

But likely to have been one of these onlookers that I spoke of earlier. On the outside. As a woman renowned for sinfulness, she would have had no place at the table of a Pharisee.

It took great courage for her to come into this situation. It took something like a holy boldness.

[14 : 42] A kind of holy nerve. A temerity. Almost an audacity. It reminded me of the other parable or the other story in the Gospels.

Where there's the woman. I think the Phoenician woman. Who said, even the little dogs eat the crumbs underneath the table. That kind of boldness and audacity.

And she bought this alabaster flask of ointment. Which, it was valuable. It was expensive. She bought her best. This would have been a kind of globular type container.

Possibly made of glass. And apparently they had very long necks. And the glass net would have been snapped to release the perfume. To release the ointment and the fragrance. It was costly.

She was standing behind him. Now, unlike us in the West. When we sit down for dinner. We sit on chairs. And we sit around the table. They would have been lying down. They would have been kind of reclining.

[15 : 49] Possibly leaning on their arm. And their legs would have been going out behind them. So, she would have had easier access to his feet. And there's so much here.

That's so beautiful. And intimate. And devotional for us to consider. She's at his feet weeping. She began to wet his feet with her tears.

There's a closeness, isn't there? She was wiping his feet with her hair. And kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. Unbinding her hair in public.

Would have been regarded as a great act of immodesty. In the culture in those days. It would have been seen as real social impropriety. And the emotion of this.

It's all quite palpable, isn't it? It's all quite palpable. It's all quite palpable. This is a most beautiful picture of intimate and heartfelt devotion to Jesus Christ.

[16:55] The woman is a beautiful picture of gratitude. Of thankfulness. As well as reverent awe. We also see a depiction of true godly sorrow in action.

The heart that yearns for Christ. Is the heart that mourns for sin. A mark of the true believer. Is godly sorrow for sin. In the Beatitudes Jesus says. Blessed are those who mourn. And we see here true repentance.

That always accompanies saving faith. When the spirit works in a sinner's heart. And Christ does his work through the gospel. There's always a mourning.

A weeping even. And at times a misery. And lamenting for our sins. Repentance and faith. Are two sides of the same coin.

[18:01] They're inseparable. One Puritan writer. I think it's Thomas Watson. Says they're the two wings. That enabled the sinner to fly. Repentance and faith.

Now in our culture. We see much levity. We see lightness. We see a kind of frothiness. A frivolity. A shallowness.

And in a sense. I think there's a danger for us in the church. Where we can almost become desensitized to sin. Things are kind of normalized. I've seen this in my own life.

And there's a desensitization that can take place. And there's little in the way of weightiness. And gravitas. That accompanies repentance. And a sorrow for sin.

And this kind of repentance is totally alien in our culture. On the other hand. We can sometimes see shows of sorrow in our culture.

[19:06] That are more akin to a kind of self-pity. And victimhood. Godly sorrow is different.

Godly sorrow sees sin for what it is. But it doesn't wallow in self-pity. There's no room for victimhood among the people of God.

We sorrow for our sin. We mourn. Godly repentance leads to seeking the saviour. Godly sorrow. And that's a big difference to worldly mourning and worldly sorrow.

Godly sorrow leads to taking responsibility for our sin. Ownership of our sin and our wrongdoing. And it leads to a true assessment of the situation.

That's what the Holy Spirit does in us. So in the scriptures we see this wonderful balance of godly mourning on one hand.

[20:15] But then a deep joy on the other hand. And the two meet. And they're rooted in the blessedness of knowing Jesus Christ as our Lord.

Godly sorrow. Although we mourn our sin. As one writer says. The key note of our Christian life is always one of joy. And I think we see that in this woman.

There's mourning. But there's also joy. Deep joy. No doubt this woman would have examined herself. But she looks to Christ.

She's looking to Christ. As McShane said. For every look to yourself. Every time you look inwards and examine yourself. Take ten looks to Christ. Do we ever mourn for sin?

Do we ever mourn for the distance between us and our beloved Saviour? Does our lack of progress in the Christian life move us to being near to tears or mourning ever?

[21:25] Now I know not all believers show their sorrow the same way. Some may never weep outwardly. But within them they carry this sadness and this mourning for sin.

She displays both a boldness and a forwardness and a sensitivity and a tender reverence in her approach to Jesus.

And her hair having contact with his feet is such a tender and intimate picture of the closeness the sinner has to her Saviour. It's a picture of love.

It's a picture of love. And it's a picture of devotion. You sense here her fragility, her vulnerability. I thought of where our Lord says a bruised reed he will not break.

A faintly burning wick he will not quench. Now it was usually the custom to anoint the head with oil. But her kissing and anointing his feet with ointment.

[22:27] It displays a kind of sacrificial devotion, a humility and a worship. There's grateful love. There's humility. There's adoration.

There's worship. There's devotion. There's selfless sacrifice in this simple yet beautiful gesture. Jesus then gives a parable to explain what's going on here spiritually.

We understand the parable. The money lender lends 500 denarii to one person and 50 denarii to another. He cancelled the debt of both. And Jesus asks, who will love him more?

Well, clearly he's pointing to the woman. She was the greater sinner. She was the one of greater need. She was the one deemed to be further away from the blessings and favour of the covenant people of God.

She was the one of such low status and ill repute due to her sin. But notice the Pharisee was still a debtor. We are all debtors regardless of social standing or class.

[23 : 28] Whether we lead an outwardly sinful life or whether we lead an outwardly upright life. The parable teaches us that we cannot pay our debt.

And we need God himself to pay that debt for us. And she's so unlike Simon, isn't she? Jesus explains, unlike Simon, she wet his feet with tears.

She anointed his feet with ointment. She kissed his feet. She did what was, unlike Simon, she did what was exceptional. While Simon failed to do what was ordinary.

She shows grateful love. And we see here a beautiful picture of our forgiving Saviour. Our forgiving Saviour.

He pronounces to Simon that her sins, which are many, are forgiven. For she loved much. Her loving much was not the cause of her forgiveness.

[24 : 30] Her loving much was the result or the fruit of her forgiveness. It's a beautiful thing. Her display of love for Christ is evidence of sins forgiven. In contrast, Jesus says, he who is forgiven little, loves little.

His lack of true hospitality is sharply contrasted with her greater love. And Jesus turns to her and says directly, your sins are forgiven.

Forgiveness. It's a wonder, isn't it? Do you ever think back to times in your past where you sinned so egregiously, so embarrassingly, that you just shudder?

I do. But then, you think, I'm forgiven for that. I'm forgiven. It's a wonder. And they respond to Jesus, those around, when they hear him say, your sins are forgiven.

Who is this? Who can forgive sins? We hear similar things in other parts of the gospel. They're cottoning on to what he's saying about himself, aren't they? Who can forgive sins?

[25 : 49] Only God can pronounce forgiveness of sin. Jesus is the God-man. The one who is fully human, yet fully divine. Does only what God can do and forgive sins.

Only the one with the divine authority can provide forgiveness, salvation and peace. Well, this is the one we come to celebrate and to be blessed by and with at communion.

We remember this wonderful gift of forgiveness that is believers that we are all recipients of. It's such a wonder, isn't it?

That we, undeserving, at times ungrateful, fickle, forgetful sinners, can be forgiven fully.

Fully and completely. That is such good news. And then we learn of the faith.

[26 : 55] Jesus speaks of faith of this woman. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace. What beautiful words. A saving faith.

It's the empty hand. It's the empty hand that comes. Nothing in my hand I bring. Simply to your cross I cling. But a saving faith has a kind of reflexive quality.

It's a response as well. It responds to the love of Christ. And saving faith acts and moves.

Not in a meritorious way. But there's both a passive element to saving faith. The empty hand that receives. The beggar that receives. Yet there's a...

It's like a conduit. It's like all the graces flow through into us. But there is an active element. There's an active element to faith where devotion, love and worship cannot help but just to be poured out of the needy sinner's heart.

[28 : 04] It's like a prayer. It's like a prayer. It's like a prayer. Faith binds the sinner to Christ. Jesus says, go in peace.

Speaks of a peace with God. No peace like it. This is a permanent and enduring state of peace that we will know in eternity. Well, I started by asking, do you love Jesus?

And knowing most of you here, if not all of you here, I believe you do love Jesus. For most of us, we would say in some measure.

I think most of us would say we don't love Jesus as much as we'd like to. But we do love him. That's why we're here, isn't it? Love to Jesus is the mark of all believers.

But it is helpful for us to remember at communion how he values our love to him as a husband does a bride. And to remember our saviour's love towards us in forgiving us, in saving us from our sin and ruin, and giving us eternal peace.

[29 : 20] We were helpfully reminded this morning that the Lord's Supper, it's a meal of thanksgiving. So let's come to the table with thankful hearts and gratitude for what our Lord has done for us.

Let's ponder refresh the forgiveness that we have been so blessed with. The salvation that has been given to us as a free gift.

And that subjective peace, as well as objective peace, peace with God, reconciliation, but that subjective peace that we can have through knowing Christ and carry into eternity.

I will end there. We will come to the table.