

A meal for the grateful

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[0 : 00] Turn in your Bibles to Luke chapter 7. I think it's page 1063 if I remember correctly.

! 1036. My memory did not serve me correctly. Thank you. 1036 in your church Bibles.

! A little series I think you're having from several of us at Christ Church on Meals with Jesus. This is the first one and it falls to me. I think about 40 years ago I used to work in the health service and there was a lady there, a Nordic lady who used to work in one of the departments. I think she was in histopathology. I was a haematologist for those who want to know. And at various social functions she had a little party piece and she would let her hair down. And what was so striking about the fact was that her hair actually came down to her ankles. It was amazing. Now I think some were embarrassed by that. The ladies might have been embarrassed. Some of the men found it quite attractive. I'm not quite sure. But this morning we're going to read about another lady who lets down her hair in a quite different situation. A highly embarrassing situation. And let's read from verse 36 of Luke chapter 7.

Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him. So he went to the Pharisees house and reclined at the table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisees house, she bought an alabaster jar of perfume and 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, if 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 men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him 500 denarii, the other 50. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he cancelled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more? Simon replied, I suppose the one who had the bigger debt cancelled. 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 didn't put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven, for she loved much.

But he who 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. Well, I wonder why the Pharisee invited Jesus to his house. We would appear to be still in the region of Nain, where earlier Jesus has just raised the son of a poor widow back to life. You can read that back in verse 11.

[3 : 43] And what do we read after that event? There's Jesus raised this man from his coffin back to life. And we read these words in chapter 6, sorry, 7 verse 16. They were all filled with awe and praise God.

They said a great prophet has appeared among us. God has come to help his people. And this news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country. You know, I wonder whether Simon recalled the story of the Shunammite woman, because she had a son who was brought back to life by Elisha. Do you remember that story back in 1 Kings? A small village just around the corner from Nain.

Was the Pharisee curious? A great prophet has arisen among us, he says in his head. God has visited his people. So was he intrigued. Luke intersperses yet another little incident where John the Baptist sends messengers to ask Jesus, who is he? And of course Jesus replies with those famous words.

Go and tell him about the miracles which are occurring. Go and tell him about the good news being preached to the poor. I am the one that the prophets talked about. I am the one from Isaiah's prophecy. I'm the one who has been sent. I am the Messiah. But then we have this little parenthesis. The Pharisees reject John's message of repentance and they reject Jesus because it's, it doesn't suit their purposes. If you look at verse 30, the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves because they had not been baptized by John.

So what is Simon about here? Curious? Sceptical? Out to catch out Jesus with some clever questioning? Because he invites him round to his house and we read that Jesus reclined at the table. So there was a practice then of lying down to eat. You laid down on your elbow and your feet were out there somewhere and you ate from a table in the middle. However, was it a snub? Was it on purpose?

[5 : 56] Just neglect? He forgets to do all the basic things that you would do when you welcome a guest. What do you do when you welcome a guest into your house? You say, come in, sit down. What would you like to drink? You know, all those sort of usual things. In this part of the world it was wash their feet, kiss them, a little oil on their head. Strange practice for our point of view but that's how it was done. It was totally ignored. And then we have this unexpected visitor. In those days it may have been even in a courtyard this meal but other people came in to watch when people had a meal like this and other people would have entered the house. Maybe they would have got a small morsel of food because it was a good deed for good old Simon just to help out the local population with a meal from time to time. But this lady enters the house. She's described as a sinner and most commentators would say that she was a prostitute. She sold her body for sex. So Simon now has the embarrassment not just that an immoral woman has entered his house but she comes to the table behind his guest.

She weeps over his feet and then the unthinkable thing, she lets down her hair. In those days that would have been akin to just you know going topless or something. It was really embarrassing. But finally she anoints his feet with an expensive bottle of perfume and you can imagine the perfume pervading the whole of the house. But Simon's embarrassment is yet to be elevated to another level isn't it? Because here he is, his thoughts focus on surely if Jesus was truly a prophet, if he is who he says he is, he would know that this woman is an unclean woman and she shouldn't be touching him and he would tell her to go away.

But Jesus as we see earlier in other chapters he knows exactly what people are thinking. He knows what Simon is thinking and he answers him before he's even asked a question.

Thank you for the water. So we have that little story of the two debtors don't we? Simon I've got something to tell you.

[8 : 19] Here are two debtors, one owing 500 denarii, that would be about £40,000 in today's money and one owing 50 denarii, that's about £4,000. Still pretty considerable sums of money. But neither could pay, both were forgiven. Who says Jesus will love the creditor more? And Simon begrudgingly admits the obvious answer. So now Jesus turns up the heat doesn't he? Simon, look at this woman. Simon could barely lift his eyes up because I mean it's too embarrassing isn't it? Look at this woman.

Look at what you omitted to do when I came in the house. No kiss, no water, no welcome at all. Simon this woman has done all the things that you should have done.

Now listen up, I tell you her sins have forgiven her because she loved much. And then a final little twist isn't there? Like this little bit, he who is forgiven little loves little.

What would Simon have been thinking at that point? It's like twisting a knife isn't it? Right to the heart of the matter. Simon, he who is forgiven little loves little. And then all the people around us saying what on earth is going on here? Who is this man? Who is this man who forgives sins? But the beauty of the story? Jesus ignores all of that and he speaks to that woman and he says your faith has saved you. Go in peace. It's a lovely story. I think it's one of the nicest stories we could start with this series. We have a brilliantly illuminated contrast. Two people encountering Jesus over a meal. And Luke has given us this wonderfully ordered account to show us something this morning. So I want us to think about how these two people saw themselves and how they saw Jesus and then how Jesus saw them. So we'll start with how these two people saw themselves. Firstly,

Simon, he was a Pharisee. I hope most of you know what a Pharisee is. He would have been a well-off man, pretty high standing in his community, posh clothes, posh house, posh everything.

Studied his Hebrew scriptures. He knew his scriptures inside out. He also thinks he knows God. He thinks that by keeping all the laws of Moses down to the little detail, he will please God. They took the Mosaic law to the extreme, as we know from other parts of the gospel. The fact that you had to rest on the Sabbath meant, you couldn't even lift a plate almost. I mean it was so ridiculous, the fine detail that they applied to the law. But the thing about him really was that he was self-righteous. He believed that what he did made him right with God. His keeping of God's law was the thing that gave him brownie points with God.

[11 : 30] That's where he was at. But we have this contrast because we have this woman who has lived a sinful life. Simon wouldn't have even, well he would have crossed the road to avoid her. She would have had no status in society, an outcast, less than worthless by his standards.

Yet she knows she's a sinner. She knew that she was a sinner. There was no doubting that. There was no pretense with her. There's no self-justification with her.

Now how about their views of Jesus? Simon has seen miraculous events. He's heard the words of Jesus spoken. He's observed Jesus as a friend of tax collectors and sinners and now he wants to see him for himself, face to face, and challenge him. And Luke, as I mentioned a few moments ago, describes the Pharisees as those who reject God's purpose for themselves. They rejected John's baptism, they rejected his message and now they refuse to believe who Jesus was. They saw themselves as the religious policemen.

They were constantly watching out for Jesus to catch him out and look out for some way that he might fail in keeping the law. They knew their Old Testament. But they refused to believe the blindingly obvious that Jesus was the Messiah. So he invites to dinner, an opportunity for Simon to check Jesus out.

But Simon wants to set the agenda. He wants to set out his questions, perhaps to question Jesus about something. But he has a problem because events overtake him, don't they? He's probably got it all set in his mind. I know what I'm going to ask him. But again, it all just falls apart because he has a visual and a verbal experience which is going to challenge his religious convictions to the core.

[13 : 32] The woman has a different view though, doesn't she? We can only interpret this from her actions. She indicates that she's come to recognise Jesus as who he is, the Lord. The one to whom she should confess her sin and seek forgiveness. We're not told anything, but we do know, don't we? What she might have heard before this event. Luke doesn't give us any detail. But there was all these messages that Jesus was giving around and about, the raising of the widow's son, the healings, the miracles and so on. She would have heard all of those things. And she's come to a point where she's discovered that Jesus really is the Lord, her Lord. But she wouldn't have been welcome at this meal, but that doesn't deter her, does it? Who's Simon? Jesus is the person I want to see. Forget Simon, forget all the others. She overcomes her fear of men because she would have been terrified otherwise. She wouldn't have dared to go near the place otherwise. But Jesus is there. She comes to his feet. She weeps. Was it in contrition for her sin?

Was it in joy at finding acceptance by Jesus? Maybe a mixture of both. But she's overcome by emotion and she doesn't care who knows it. She doesn't care. She doesn't care who sees it. She's completely in the moment with Jesus, her saviour. So there are two opposing views of self, two opposing views of Jesus. But what about Jesus' view of these two people? First is Simon. Simon has to hear some uncomfortable truths. Not just the pointing out of his failure in basic hospitality. But four things to note, Simon. Listen up. Simon, Jesus accepts sinners. Jesus doesn't turn the woman away. She comes and worships at his feet, a sign of her unworthiness and recognition of Jesus' status. She was a woman. For the Pharisee, that meant she was a second-class citizen. She was a social outcast because of her open sin. But Jesus accepts sinners. Simon, get that into your head. Now Simon 2, number 2, Jesus forgives sinners. Her sins are forgiven. Why?

Because of her actions? No, absolutely not. Her actions are as a consequence of something already happening in here. She comes in response to having been forgiven and coming in faith to Jesus. Because Jesus explains that in verse 50, doesn't he? Your faith has saved you. That's an act that she's already done in coming. So Simon, number 2, Jesus forgives sinners. Simon, number 3, you also are a sinner.

And you need forgiveness. The parable Jesus tells about the two debtors clearly makes that point, doesn't it? They're both debtors. They both need forgiveness.

[16:47] And lastly, Simon, just take note. I am the one who can forgive sins. You've been hearing about me. You've heard about the miracles. You've seen miracles. You've heard my message. Am I a prophet? No, I'm more than a prophet. I am the one John preached about. I am the Messiah. I am Jesus, Savior. Savior, Savior, rescuer. So, Jesus' view of Simon. What is Jesus' view of the woman?

She's a sinner. Jesus talks about her many sins, doesn't he? Her sins, which are many, are forgiven her. He knew all there was to know about her. So, Jesus' first point really is that she's a sinner, but he also observes that she loved much. She demonstrated her love way, way above and beyond the social niceties.

Her perfume bottle, forgive me, was probably the most valuable thing she had, and she used it to anoint his feet. He has compassion on her as he brings her to the two comforting truths. Her many sins are forgiven, and secondly, her faith has saved her. Where once, he says, you were an enemy of God, you are now forgiven by trusting in me. Go in peace.

So, what joy that must have been for her to know that she was forgiven and saved, a saved sinner. Well, what would Luke want us to take away from this story this morning?

First of all, I think the message to Simon is to all of us, isn't it? Many people today believe that their own righteousness is the key to the afterlife, the key to heaven.

[18:53] They have an idea that there will be a judgment day, yeah? Many people believe that. There's going to be a day when we will have to give an account, but they're going to say, well, I can argue the case before the judge on the final day.

I've not lived a bad life. A few mistakes here and there, but so does everybody, don't they? I mean, that's, you know, that's par for the course. Some say they can't wait to have it out with God about some terrible event which has blighted their life.

How utterly foolish are such thoughts. We need to be clear on this one thing first and foremost.

There's no one who's ever lived up to God's standard except Jesus. Paul reminds us in Romans 3, all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory.

That includes Simon the Pharisee. It includes the prostitute. It includes kings, presidents, Yanachenko in Ukraine. Emperors, servants, the lowest of all people.

Everyone stands before God condemned. And worthy only of everlasting punishment. How on earth can anybody be saved? But Jesus tells this woman, firstly, that her sins are forgiven.

[20:08] And secondly, her faith has saved her. Trusting in Jesus Christ for forgiveness is the only way to escape judgment on that day. Recognising that we are helped to do anything about our own sin and our own shortcomings is the only way of salvation.

Because forgiveness, if you notice that, it's a gift, isn't it? It's a free gift that he gives to this woman. She doesn't work for it. She doesn't have to earn it in any way at all.

She trusts Jesus and he's given her this gift. It is all of grace. We can contribute nothing to our salvation.

You may have heard that many times before. But have you reached that point where you are going to believe it? You can see who Jesus is. You've heard about him so many times.

The very Son of God who came to give his life for you. But have you got to that point where you are contrite? Maybe you have shed tears of contrition at the feet of Jesus.

[21:16] Are you going to confess faith in him alone to save you? What's stopping you? Is it pride? You're not prepared to confess you're a sinner in need of Jesus?

This woman didn't have any fears at all, did she? She just said, I've got to see Jesus. And she went, she was totally careless of everyone else around her.

She wanted to see Jesus. Do what she did. Follow her example. Go to the feet of Jesus. Don't worry about what anyone else says. She didn't care about Simon or what he thought.

Neither should you. Are you worried about what other people are going to say? Oh, you've become a Christian? Forget that. The most important thing is to get right with Jesus now.

To those of us who believe, who are believers, who have trusted Jesus, there are a number of applications to think about briefly.

[22:16] First of all, it's a great story to share, isn't it? Share it with others. If you've been using the uncover book, the uncover book at all, please go and make use of it.

Make sure you understand the story. And don't fall into the trap where people believe that it's actually a work story. The woman has paid with the perfume for her salvation.

There's a sense of that in the Roman Catholic doctrines, which says, you know, that this woman was actually contributing to her salvation. She did nothing for her salvation. Her faith was what saved her.

Saved her a complete trust in Jesus. But a little thought about devotion here. This woman gave so much at that point, didn't she? She was overcome with her love for Jesus.

So how far does our devotion go? A little challenge for us this morning who are believers. Paul writes 11 chapters of Romans explaining the gospel of grace, doesn't he?

[23 : 24] The wonders of what was done at the cross. You see, at just the right time when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person.

Someone might possibly dare to die, but God demonstrates his own love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Then we get to chapter 12, don't we, verse 1.

What does it say? Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, wow, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.

This is your true and proper worship. When you stop and think about God's grace in your life, in my life, how do you wake up in the morning?

Is that, praise my soul, the king of heaven ringing in your ears when you wake up on a Monday morning? Maybe not. Does anybody wake up with a hymn in their head when they wake up?

[24 : 26] I do sometimes. It's wonderful, actually, when it happens. Do you ask that question when you wake up in the morning, what can I do for you, Lord, today?

That's the question, isn't it? Thank you, Lord. You saved me. I'm a saved person. I'm a saved sinner. You go back to the cross every day and you remember what Jesus has done for you.

Then you say, what can I do for you today, Lord? In view of your love for me, in view of the price you paid for me, what can I do for you? There are times when I think we do need to be introspective.

We need to look at our sin. Of course we do. We need to confess that. And we need to weep sometimes when we realise our sinfulness. But there should also be tears of joy when we realise God's grace.

We don't need to dwell on our sin, confess it, accept his forgiveness, repent. And move forward in his strength. Remember with gratefulness those wonderful verses.

[25 : 31] I will be merciful toward their iniquities. I will remember their sins no more. As far as the east is from the west, he has removed our transgressions from us. Amen. Isn't that what it's about?

What Jesus has done for you and me. The woman in our story could not have been more wholehearted in her devotion, could she? Tears of contrition, tears of joy, giving her most valuable possession in an act of worship.

How does your devotion show itself? A couple more points. Pride. Paul also highlights something else in our story this morning.

He reminds us to not think of ourselves more highly than we ought to. Remember that? Romans 12, 3. For by the grace given me, I say to every one of you, do not think of yourself more highly than you ought.

But rather think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. And Paul goes on to talk about service in the body of Christ.

[26 : 44] How Simon judged indeed. He thought in his heart, if only Jesus knew how wicked this woman was. Boy, did he have a plank in his eye?

I think he did, you know. Go back to chapter 6, verse 41, you'll see Jesus talking about those very things. The speck of dust in your brother's eye and the plank in your own.

Do you judge others? Do you judge others? Do you judge other brothers and sisters? We do, you know. We do.

The default mode is, I'm better than them. Do you judge those who are not Christians? Jesus' love extends to the most blatant of sinners, doesn't it?

His love extended itself to you, didn't it? Is there any hint of the Pharisee in you? Or me? It needs challenging.

[27 : 52] It needs challenging on a daily basis, doesn't it? What do you really mean when you say, there but for the grace of God go I?

We're almost sounding like the Pharisee, aren't we? I thank God that I'm not like other men. We've got to be really, really careful. Get back to the basics.

Jesus' love extended itself to you. Be careful that you don't sound like a Pharisee and that you don't act like a Pharisee.

It's all too easy. So three challenges to sum up as we close. How much does Jesus mean to us? As we look at the overflowing heart of the woman in this story.

Does it overflow with love for Jesus? Does it show itself in how you live your life? How you live your life in relation to your brothers and sisters and to those outside the church?

[28 : 52] How you use your money, how you use your time, how you spend your life? As we look at the Pharisee, do you have a judgmental attitude to others?

Brothers and sisters, all those outside the faith, be careful. And finally, let's look at Jesus in this story and take this thought away.

This wonderful picture of compassion, of grace. And who would you not talk to about him? Let's take a moment of quiet.

Father, if there's anyone here this morning who hasn't yet acknowledged you as Lord and Saviour, we pray that you would be at work in their hearts until they cry out for mercy and for grace.

Father, for those of us who believe and we know our Lord Jesus, may we be challenged to love you more, to serve you more.

[30 : 26] And Father, we just pray that you would help us by your Holy Spirit to take away something from this message this morning. We thank you for our Lord Jesus Christ, the one who loved us, gave himself for us, and is so compassionate and so full of grace.

And we thank you in his name. Amen.