

What is Devotion to Christ? And What Is Its Source?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 February 2025

Preacher: Rev. Jonathan St. Clair

[0 : 00] We hope that you enjoy this teaching from Christ Church. This material is copyrighted and no unauthorized duplication, redistribution, or any other use of any part is permitted without prior consent from Christ Church.

Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Good morning.

I am Abigail Todd, and I am part of Christ Church Kids. Today's scripture reading is from the Gospel according to Luke, chapter 7, verse 36 to chapter 8, verse 3, as printed in the liturgy.

A reading from the Gospel according to Luke. 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.

[1 : 09] 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 that 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. 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 toward the woman and said to Simon, Do you see this woman? I came to 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 pour oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.

[2 : 16] 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. After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God.

The twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases. Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had come out, Joanna, the wife of Chusa, the manager of Herod's household, Susanna, and many others.

These women were helping to support them out of their own means. This is the gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, O Christ. Let's see if my mic is working now. Can you hear me? All right.

Abby, fantastic reading. Thank you so much. So, one of my favorite book discussions that we've ever had here at Christ Church was in 2011.

[3 : 25] Thank you so much, Walt. Appreciate that. 2011, we got a group of people together, and we read this book by a New Testament scholar.

His name is Ben Witherington. And we basically read his work that he did in his Ph.D. thesis at the University of Durham in England. And the name of the book is called Women and the Genesis of Christianity.

And it was a fantastic group. It was a mixed-gender group. We had people there from, you know, church backgrounds that were more maybe patriarchal and authoritarian.

I remember we had a woman in there who was getting her Ph.D. at Cal in, like, women and gender and sexuality studies. And as you can imagine, it was just a really lively group in our living room.

And sadly, I can't find my copy of the book, but I do remember that we dove deep into this portion of Scripture. And Witherington made this point.

[4 : 27] He said, prior to Jesus, there were no women disciples of any Jewish rabbis or teachers. And so Jesus is creating this counterculture that had never been seen with female disciples.

He transforms this woman in Luke 7, and we're going to be looking at her story in a moment. But there's also these other female disciples who are named here as traveling companions and witnesses of Jesus and His mission.

So, for example, who is this woman, this lead female disciple, Mary Magdalene? We know that Jesus gave nicknames to His disciples. Peter, He called the Rock.

You know, James and John, He called the Sons of Thunder. And so you've got, you know, Rocky and the Thunder Boys as part of Jesus' group. And then you've got Mary Magdalene, which either means from Magdala, her hometown, or it means the Magdalene, the tower.

Right? So you've got this woman who's had a rough background, a rough life. And Jesus powerfully transforms her into this strong, towering disciple.

[5 : 40] Right? And then you've got this woman named Joanna. She's a woman clearly of high status. Her husband manages the estate, the vineyards of the king. And then we're not told much about Susanna and these many other women disciples of Jesus, but we do know from what Luke tells us that they were funding Jesus.

They were bankrolling the apostles out of their properties and their possessions. If you read to the end of the gospel, at the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus, all the male disciples had run away in fear.

And so the primary eyewitnesses to these world-changing events were these women. Mary Magdalene, in fact, was the first to see the empty tomb. She was the first to encounter the risen Jesus.

And she's the one who actually went and shared the news with Peter, James, and John. So Jesus' attitude toward female disciples, toward these women, really carried over into the life of the early church.

Paul, the apostle, gave his greatest epistle to a woman named Phoebe to go and read it, explain it, and apply it to the Romans. He called a woman Priscilla, his co-worker in Jesus Christ.

[6 : 54] He called Junia an apostle. He greets a woman named Nympha as the leader of a house church in Colossae. If we had all day, it would be so fun to talk to you about how radical this actually was in the first century and still is even today in many parts of the world.

But really, the person, the woman I want to focus on the most is this woman in Luke 7. And you've got to know that there are two stories in the Gospels where Jesus is being anointed by women.

One of them is in Luke 7 here. It's early in Jesus' ministry. It's in northern Israel in a town called Nain, which is near Nazareth. And the other story is told by Matthew, Mark, and John.

And it happens just before Jesus' crucifixion in southern Israel in Bethany, which is near Jerusalem. So you've got to be careful not to confuse and conflate these two anointings.

But I want to ask three questions of this story for us today. How do you approach Jesus? How do you see your condition?

[8 : 07] And how does the root of forgiveness bear the fruit of love? So those are our three questions. How do you approach Jesus? How do you see your condition?

And how does the root of forgiveness bear the fruit of love? So first of all, how do you approach Jesus? We meet here these two real historical people and they approach Jesus in two very different ways.

In fact, Jesus evaluates and contrasts their approaches to Him. And we notice that this is a contrast not between someone who's open to Jesus and someone who's hostile to Jesus.

It's not a contrast between someone who's interested in Jesus and someone who's indifferent to Jesus. Rather, Simon and this woman, they hold in common, they're both in the presence of the same person and they both desire to see and to know Jesus.

And we read in verse 36, when one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with Him, He went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. And if you're new to the Scriptures, the Pharisees, they were the pastors, they were the Bible teachers, and Jesus critiqued them the most.

[9 : 18] And they were mostly opposed to Jesus, except for just a handful of them. And one of them is a guy named Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a Pharisee. And he came to talk to Jesus, but he came at night.

He came in secret. He came so that no one would see he was talking to Jesus. But Simon, this Pharisee, is open, right? He openly invites Jesus to come to his home in this public feast, like you would invite the synagogue teacher over for a Sabbath meal.

And so in this way, Simon is subverting the dominant paradigm. This is not a popular thing to do in his circles and in his tribe. He's open to Jesus. He's interested in Jesus.

He's attracted to and admires Jesus. He's curious to know more about Jesus. He wants to learn from Jesus. And we notice, if you look in verse 39 and 40, it's clear that he thinks that Jesus is more than just a teacher of the Scriptures.

Right? He thinks maybe Jesus is a prophet of God. Maybe Jesus is a special messenger of God. He has a special relationship with God and has been chosen to speak for God like a prophet does.

[10 : 39] But Simon, who's open to Jesus and who's interested in Jesus, he ends up being very surprised by Jesus. He ends up being critiqued and reprimanded and actually condemned by Jesus.

And I can imagine that he felt fairly miffed about that. Right? He felt annoyed and disgruntled by Jesus because Jesus is showing that something is seriously lacking in Simon's approach.

Something is completely inadequate about the way he's approaching Jesus. And Jesus, he contrasts Simon with this woman. And I don't know, I couldn't really, didn't have the time this week to double check this, but she's praised, I think, by almost more than anyone else in the Gospels.

Jesus just goes on and on about this woman. And notice at the end of the story, she walks away with confidence, right? She walks away with a confidence that she's forgiven and free.

She walks away with a sense that she has faith in God's saving grace. She has a great love for Jesus. She has great peace.

[11 : 47] She has the peace of God in her heart. But how does Simon go away from Jesus? He goes away seemingly with no forgiveness, no grace, no faith, no love, no peace.

In fact, he's massively dishonored Jesus. It's a striking contrast, isn't it? Two people in the presence of the same person both desiring to see and to know Jesus.

Jesus. And as far as Jesus is concerned, he has the power to give them both the same things, right? He could have done the same thing for both of them and how utterly different is the end result here.

One is condemned and the other is pardoned and receives a gift of salvation. Why is that? Well, Simon is interested in Jesus in a mainly intellectual way.

I think that's his primary problem. He's all head with no heart and no hands like this woman. He's intrigued by the words and the works of Jesus.

[12 : 52] He's heard about Jesus' ability to heal the diseases of the body. He's heard about Jesus' ability to give rest to tormented and troubled souls. And so Simon is curious.

He's prepared to consider Jesus. He's ready to investigate and to examine Jesus with a kind of cool and detached attitude and to have Jesus answer his questions.

And he says, okay, Jesus, I want to have you over for dinner and a discussion about your extraordinary claims to be the Messiah, right? Your claims to be the one who fulfills and interprets God's scriptures, the one who claims to be the only way to God.

I want to talk about that. I'd love to have you over, Jesus, and talk about your claim to have the authority to forgive sins and to be the judge of all the peoples of the world and to grant eternal life.

I'd love to talk about that over dinner. I'd love to know more, Jesus, about why it is that you demand everyone to deny themselves, take up their crosses, and come follow you in utter obedience.

[14 : 01] Simon's openness, Simon's interest, Simon's curiosity to explore and to examine Jesus is a very good thing, and we share this in common with Simon.

I don't think we'd be in this building today if that weren't the case, but Simon, he's standing apart, right? Simon is sitting loose. He's holding back.

He's keeping all of his options open. His curiosity is real, but it's superficial, right? It's lacking in depth, and Christ to him is just an intellectual problem, right?

He's not really willing to fall at the feet of Jesus. He's not willing to give himself to Jesus, but oh, how different is this woman, right?

Her interest is far deeper. She's moved to the depths, right? She wants a personal relationship with Jesus that involves her whole self, utterly and completely, head, heart, hands, holding nothing back.

[15 : 06] She's all in. In fact, let's just read it again. Verse 37, it says, 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, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and poured perfume on them.

Meanwhile, Simon is detached, he's holding back, he's superficial, he's only engaged with his head. And I wonder today which attitude and which approach you bring to Jesus.

Right? Are you merely seeking knowledge about Jesus objectively and cognitively and rationally, which is good and which is essential? Or are you also wanting to know Jesus subjectively and personally and experientially?

Right? This is the fundamental difference that Jesus critiques and condemns. Right? In verse 44, he says, Simon, do you see this woman? I came into your house, you did not give me any water for my feet, but she, she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.

You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, she, from the time I entered, she's not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she, she has poured out perfume on my feet.

[16 : 34] Do you approach Jesus like Simon or like this woman? That's the question. And the second question is this, not only how do you approach Jesus, but how do you see your condition?

How do you see your condition? Right? Simon responds in verse 39, he says, 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.

Right? He's questioning Jesus' status as a prophet because if Jesus had divine revelation, if Jesus had divine insight, then he would know that a righteous man should not be in a relationship with this sinful woman.

woman. And actually, the Greek in verse 37, it says literally that this is a woman, this woman is a sinner of the city is what the Greek says.

She's a sinner of the city, which is a polite idiom for one of the world's oldest professions. Right? She's a lady of the night, she's a woman of ill repute, she works in the red light district, she's a sex worker, she's a prostitute.

[17 : 43] And we're not told how she got there. Perhaps her parents fell into poverty and she was forced into this work, maybe she's widowed or divorced and she's desperate to feed her kids, we don't know.

But we can imagine that many, many self-serving men have stolen her sense of identity, her sense of dignity and honor and confidence. We can assume that she feels oppressed by guilt and shame and fear.

And we're also not told how she had experienced Jesus before this moment, but it seems that she already has. It seems she already had met Jesus and she had heard Jesus' message in his manifesto that we looked at a few weeks ago in Luke 4 where Jesus says, I've come to preach good news for the poor.

I've come to bring freedom to prisoners. I've come to bring liberation for those who are oppressed. I've come to bring the year of the Lord's favor and his grace.

And that's the reason she's falling at the feet of Jesus because she's experienced that. She's experienced Jesus' forgiveness of her sins. She's experienced the fact that all of her spiritual and moral debts to God have been canceled.

[18 : 59] That's why she's at the feet of Jesus. Now in the ancient Near East, you don't have your feet under a table like sitting on a chair. You're reclining on a couch with your bare feet extended out behind you and that's kind of how she's able to sneak up on Jesus as it were.

And she's standing there at his feet and she's got this flask, this jar, this bottle around her neck of perfumed ointment. And we've got to understand that this is the thing that causes her to be attractive.

This is the thing that causes her to be desirable. It's the very thing that allows her to make money. It's the very thing that's given her success. It's her most treasured possession.

It's worth probably about a year's wages. And she's come to Jesus' feet so that she can break that bottle open and cleanse his dirty feet and sweeten his smelly feet and soften his callous feet and soothe his tired feet.

And you know only slaves dealt with feet. Only slaves dealt with the feet of their hosts and their guests but she doesn't care. She's actually honored to be a slave of Jesus because she wants to show how much she's been forgiven by him in this act of costly love.

[20 : 23] And so she gets there and before she even can begin this anointing she's so moved by the presence of Jesus and the power of Jesus that she begins weeping.

Right? She begins to shed these tears of repentance these tears of freedom these tears of absolute joy. They start to fall on the feet of Jesus. I assume that's how he even knew she was there.

He can feel her tears. And you gotta know also that in this culture for a woman to let down her hair was the most intimate most vulnerable thing you could do.

In fact if a married woman let down her hair in public it was grounds for divorce. That's how intimate of a signal this is. And she doesn't really seem to care.

She just undoes her hair and she begins drying the feet of Jesus and kissing the feet of Jesus and she starts to break open this bottle this tool of her trade.

[21 : 24] Right? The one thing that gives her power in the world the one thing that gives her leverage in the world this most precious thing in her life she starts to pour it out on the feet of Jesus and I can imagine as she does that she says I love you Jesus.

I love you Jesus. Simon is outraged. Right? Simon is scandalized. If you 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 and Jesus answered him Simon I have something to tell you.

Now if Jesus ever says that to you just hold on you know like brace yourself it's going to be rough it's going to be rough Simon I have something to tell you he says you think I'm not a prophet huh?

Well not only do I know who this woman is but I know who you are. In fact I even know what you're thinking right now I see the thoughts in your mind and I can see that you don't even really know yourself you don't even know the condition that you're in and so Jesus says let's have a little prophetic story time right now about these two debtors and he says this in verse 41 two people owed money to a certain money lender one owed him 500 denarii the other 50 neither of them had the money to pay him back so he forgave the debts of both now which of them will love him more?

Simon you think that this woman is a big time debtor and you think that she has not lived right before God and that is true but what about you?

[23 : 08] Don't you realize Simon that it's not about the number of your debts it's not about the size of your debts don't you see Simon that your state and your condition of being a debtor of being a sinner puts you in the exact same predicament as this woman she owes God over a year's wages and you owe God about two months wages but who cares even though you're a nice guy Simon and I really do like you even though you've lived a good and moral and respectable life even though you're theologically orthodox even though you're ethically circumspect even though you're spiritually engaged and religiously committed Simon have you really loved the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul and with all your mind every moment of every day have you really loved your neighbor as yourself at every moment and every opportunity

James the brother of Jesus he writes a letter in the New Testament and he says this in James 2.10 he says for whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it Simon I have something to tell you you owe God just like this woman owes God you are both in the same condition the same state of being debtors you're both penniless you both have nothing whatsoever to pay you're both justly condemned under the law and you both deserve to lose everything and to die in a debtor's prison you Simon you're identical with this woman you are on the exact same level spiritually and morally both of you are insolvent both of you are bankrupt both of you are poor and you Simon you're powerless to clear the ledgers you cannot reconcile your accounts with God in fact the only way that you can have your debts cancelled and forgiven is in precisely the same way as this woman and you see what Jesus is doing is he's given this little prophetic parable as smelling salts to Simon because Simon has no idea how desperate he is he has no clue how helpless and how hopeless he is unless a gracious benefactor comes to pay the cost and to save from his predicament and the irony is that somehow

Simon has invited to his house and to his table one who is actually righteous one who actually has never sinned one who is able to absorb and pay down and forgive all of his debts but Simon gives no impression that this is the most important person he's ever encountered he gives no indication that this is the most vital and momentous occasion of his life there's no signal that here and now Simon could possibly obtain something from Jesus which will make an eternal difference for him he just wants to have a detached discussion with Jesus he just wants to coolly consider Jesus and critically examine Jesus and stand ultimately in judgment on Jesus and the people who love Jesus many a guest had been honored in Simon's house and at his table but he's failed to honor the most important and most honorable guest the one who matters the most the one who could forgive his debts and the question in the story is what about you how do you see your condition right how do you understand your predicament do you know yourself to be a desperate debtor it doesn't matter what the size of the debt is and do you know that there's actually only one way out so how do you approach Jesus how do you see your condition and finally how does the root of forgiveness bear the fruit of love how does the root of forgiveness bear the fruit of love it's clear from Simon's attitude and Simon's behavior that you know he's lacking in love for Jesus he's lacking in love for this woman and therefore he knows neither the depths of his sin nor the heights of Jesus and the forgiveness and salvation that's on offer to him you know if a king had come to his house

Simon would have done everything he could to show the greatness and the worth of that person here's the eternal son of God in the flesh at his table if only Simon would have fallen at the feet of Jesus like this woman she actually is the model for all time of what we ought to do and what we should do and this is what Jesus says in verse 47 he says therefore I tell you Simon her many sins have been forgiven as her great love has shown but whoever has been forgiven little loves little and that's so easy to misinterpret and misunderstand because some people can say ah I see because her loving deeds because of her loving deeds to Jesus she's forgiven her sins are forgiven because of her actions she's somehow earned she's somehow merited her debts being cancelled but the gospel of Jesus the good news of Jesus is actually the exact opposite of that her love is the proof her love is the evidence that she has been forgiven her love is the response to God's grace in Jesus that she's clinging to by faith her love is the consequence and not the cause of her salvation right the reason she has the ability to love in this way is because she sees in Jesus the one who's come to cancel her debts and she doesn't even remotely have a clue what that even means right she doesn't know what that's going to cost to Jesus she just knows that Jesus is the one and the grace of God is liberating her in this moment to bring all of her needs all of her failures all of her debts to the feet of Jesus and just cast herself completely on him it's the grace of God that's unlocking those tears right that are rolling down her cheeks those tears of repentance and far from coming to test

Jesus and examine Jesus like Simon far from being cool and detached she just can't restrain herself and that's what grace does grace moves her to the very depth of her being and what begins to flow out of her forgiven heart what flows out of her free heart is this faith that's expressing itself in love it's a love that's not merely subjective feelings and emotions and affections though it must contain that but it's a love of objective actions it's a costly love it's a consequential love right she's lavishing devotion and adoration and honor and gratitude on Jesus not just with her head but with her heart and with her hands like we sang about a moment ago take my love my Lord I pour at its feet my treasure store take myself and I will be ever and only and all for thee what she's saying in this moment is not Jesus

[31 : 10] I'm not just adding you as one more thing into my very full life she's saying Jesus you are my life everything I am is yours everything I have is yours and it's remarkable that she acts out her love without even knowing how Jesus is going to act out his love on the cross right because Jesus when he says to people your sins are forgiven your debts are cancelled he can't just say that and then poof it just vanishes in the air someone has to pay the cost right someone has to eat the debts and absorb the debts and that's why Jesus gave himself for us entirely and completely in the agony of his crucifixion we could not pay so he paid he shed his blood and in shedding his blood he bore our debts and he reconciled our account with God and so it's only fitting if he gave himself utterly and completely for us that we would give ourselves utterly and completely for him that we would take that flask whatever it is in our lives we would take that bottle whatever the most important thing is and we break it and we just pour it out on Jesus you know we can no longer fall at Jesus physical feet we can no longer wash or kiss or anoint his feet right the resurrected

Jesus he's ascended to the right hand of the father he's been exalted to that place of all power and authority but you can show your love to Jesus by forsaking your sins you can show your love to Jesus by taking his commands seriously and obeying them right you can show your love to Jesus by praising him not just with your lips but with your life you can show your love to Jesus by telling other people that he really is the love of your life Jesus says to her and he says to us your faith has saved you go in peace but don't misunderstand that when Jesus says go in peace he's not saying hey good luck with everything and just go live however you'd like to live now when Jesus says go in peace he's saying I want you to in some ways come in peace come live a new life in my disciple community come join

Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Susanna and all these other women come learn how to live in my grace and in my peace come let me master all of your relationships and your time and your job and your money and your sexuality and all the rest go in peace to love me as the Lord in every area of your life that's what that means see the root of forgiveness bears the fruit of love and the costly forgiveness of the cross must show itself in the costly love of our discipleship so friends do you love Jesus do you love Jesus like this woman loves Jesus has he removed your debts has he given rest to your troubled and tormented souls has Jesus put the peace of God into your heart if he has just know he's worthy he's worthy of all that we could possibly pour out on him in the name of the father son and holy spirit amen