

Grace and Gratitude

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- [0 : 0 0] Luke chapter 7, and let's just reread verse 47. Luke chapter 7, verse 47, Therefore I tell you, her sins which are many are forgiven, for she loved much.
- He who is forgiven little loves little. And he said to her, Your sins are forgiven. Now Luke's account of Christ's ministry confronts us with two questions.
- Who was Jesus and why did he come? Who was Jesus and why did he come? And if we get the answers to these questions wrong, our whole theology will be wrong.
- Our whole Christian experience will be wrong if we get the wrong answers to these questions. That's why it's very important as Christians that we live frequently in the Gospels.
- We should never be far from the Gospels. And whatever Bible reading plan we use, we should often be reading about the person and work of Jesus in the Gospels.
- [1 : 1 9] And Luke 7 gives us lots of reminders and signposts that Christ was no ordinary prophet. The chapter starts with the healing of the centurion's son.
- This remarkable passage where the centurion sends out messengers to say to Christ, Can you come and heal my servant?
- And the centurion's son. And the centurion stops Christ before he even gets to the house and says that he was unworthy for Christ to come in to the house. And without even a word, without so much as a word, the servant is healed.
- We're told that they go back to the house and they find the servant well. Without even a word, Christ can heal. We then see in the next few verses the raising of the widow of Nain's son.
- As I say, this miracle is unique to the Gospel of Luke. And here we find Jesus. He touches the bier. He touches the cradle which the body was in.
- [2 : 3 4] And suddenly this boy that was dead, he sits up. Time and time again we're being reminded that this is no ordinary prophet.
- And then John sends out his disciples to ask Jesus, Are you the one who is to come or shall we look for another?
- And what does Jesus do? He immediately says to them in verse 22, Go and tell John what you have seen and heard. The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.
- Now what does that remind us of? Well it reminds us of course of the great messianic prophecies in Isaiah. Isaiah 35, Isaiah 61. What Christ is saying is, he says, I am the fulfilment of these prophecies in the Old Testament.
- I am no ordinary prophet. And time and time again Jesus is saying, This is who I am, and this is why I have come.
- [3 : 5 5] Jesus could reverse blindness, He could reverse lameness, He could reverse leprosy, He could reverse deafness, and He could raise the dead.

And as he says, His great work was to preach good news to the poor. And you see, Luke 7 makes this so clear, we might say, How could anybody deny it?

How could anybody get this wrong? How could anyone twist or pervert Christ's identity or mission? That's exactly what people did.

And that's what they've been doing for 2,000 years. Verse 30 says, What that literally means is, They despised Christ's message.

They annulled it. They set it at nothing. They had no interest in what Christ was saying. And you see, that's why Christ compares the people of this generation to children.

[5 : 05] What are children like? Children are wayward. They are strong-willed. They want their own way. And that's why He compares the people of His generation to children.

John the Baptist came. He lived an ascetic lifestyle. He lived in the wilderness. And he thought he was a demon. And then Jesus comes, and He eats with publicans and sinners.

And what did they accuse Jesus of? They accused Him of gluttony and drunkenness. It doesn't matter what approach they used. The Pharisees hated the man, and they hated the message.

And what we're getting at is the heart of the human condition. That's why it is utter folly for us to try and entertain people in church, to try and compromise the message of the gospel.

Because the issue is not the way the message is communicated. The issue is the human heart. So the climax of a chapter is these last few verses from verse 36.

[6 : 16] After a chapter full of miracles, what Jesus does is He compares false Christianity with authentic Christianity.

Or false religion and true religion. And this account that we have in Luke of the anointing of Christ's feet is, I believe, a unique account.

There are four accounts of anointing in the gospels. Matthew 26, Mark 14 and John 12. Christ is anointed in all these different passages. And we could spend a lot of time going into the detail of all these different anointings.

But it would appear that Matthew 26, Mark 14 and John 12 are all the same anointing. And this account in Luke is different. Why do we say that?

Well, in Matthew 26 and Mark 14, both the anointings take place at Bethany, at Simon the leper. John 12 is also at Bethany.

[7 : 19] But we're told it takes place where Lazarus was. So all three accounts were in Bethany. We're told in John 12 that it was Mary, the sister of Lazarus, that anointed Christ.

In Matthew 26 and Mark 14, we're told there was an alabaster flask was used. And Mark 14 and John 12, we're told it was pure nard, that expensive ointment.

There are many things that we could go into. But it would appear that the Matthew, Mark and John account are all the same anointing. And this Luke account is at a much earlier stage in the ministry of Christ.

Christ's response to the other anointings was that this was a wonderful preparation for his burial. He says that in all the other three passages. So it would appear that it was later in Christ's ministry.

And he also says in Matthew 26 and Mark 14, that wherever the gospel is preached, that this account will be told in memory of the woman.

[8 : 23] So this anointing, it would appear, is a unique account in the gospels. And it would appear it was much earlier in Christ's ministry because they say at the end, who is this who even forgives sins?

There didn't appear to be a developed knowledge of Christ at this stage in his ministry. So let's look at this passage. Let's look at this passage to see what we can learn this morning.

And the first thing we want to talk about is pride and prejudice. Pride and prejudice. And first of all, under this heading, we see an invitation accepted. One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table.

The original meaning of this word, invited, is a bit stronger than invited. It's more like the old word, beseech or plead. Simon was desperate to get Christ into his house.

I think Simon saw Christ as a great catch. He was a religious man and we're told back in verse 17 that Christ had a growing reputation.

[9 : 41] And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country. It says there, Fear seized them all and they glorified God, saying a great prophet has arisen among us.

So Christ had a great reputation by this time. And Simon was desperate to get Christ into the house. Perhaps he wanted to engage and debate with Christ about the law.

Perhaps Simon thought that Christ was maybe one of them. Maybe he was a Pharisee or maybe he could become a Pharisee. A bit like Nicodemus who said, Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher.

Maybe Simon thought that this teacher could be one of his tribe that could help out the Pharisees. And that would maybe explain Simon's disappointment there in verse when he says that, you know, he says that he thought he was a prophet.

Now we're told that they declined at table. So, in the West, we have a very private, we generally live very private lives.

[10 : 51] We go into our homes, we close our doors, we generally eat together, usually at a table. But in these days, in the hot countries in first century Palestine, houses would have been much more open.

They would have been like open verandas. The meals would have been quite public. And of course, they would have climbed on couches. They would have leaned on their left elbow and their feet would have been behind them.

And the meal would have been a very public meal. And of course, the sandals would have been removed before they sat down at table.

And in the middle of this meal, we see, secondly under this heading, a surprising anointing in verses 37 and 38. We're told that the meal was disrupted by a woman of the city who was a sinner.

Or perhaps more accurately, who was known as a sinner. Who was she? Well, it's very important we say this. The Bible does not tell us who she was.

[11 : 59] Anyone that says who she was is indulging in pure speculation. There are all sorts of traditions that have grown up that she was Mary Magdalene. Joan Bunyan thinks she was Mary of Bethany.

But we just don't know. We don't know who this woman was. And we shouldn't speculate. Many people think that because it says that she was a sinner or a known sinner, that it is likely that she would have been a prostitute.

Some people think that because her hair was hanging down, that that could have signified that she was a prostitute. The Jewish woman would have had their hair held tightly and usually covered.

So it's possible that that indicates that she was a prostitute. But again, we don't know. What we do know is that she was certainly a woman with a past.

She was a woman with a reputation. And she was a woman that when Simon saw her, he was disgusted that Christ would allow himself to be touched by her.

[13 : 05] There was something unclean about this woman, even ceremonially unclean. So it's possible she could have been a prostitute. How did this woman, how had this woman heard of Christ?

Again, we don't know. Some people speculate that she heard a sermon by Jesus. But it would seem likely that she had come under some sense of the gospel and that she was coming out of an acknowledgement of that change in her life.

She was coming to worship and to thank Christ for what he had done. Something had happened to this woman and she had a sense that she was a great sinner and she wanted to come to a great saviour.

And Jesus chooses this setting to try and teach us what the true gospel is all about.

He chooses this woman and this Pharisee. He chooses this picture of this meal to show us exactly what the true gospel is. It's worth remembering, of course, that this was all pre-cross.

[14 : 19] We find it hard, I think, to read the New Testament and the early part of the New Testament and to remember that this is before the cross.

So this woman had a sense that Christ was her redeemer and her saviour with very limited knowledge. Somehow she knew that Christ was more than a prophet and that he could save her.

And surely that makes this woman's faith all the more remarkable. And of course we see this stark difference between the host and the woman.

How does she approach Christ? Well, she comes in humility. It was normal to anoint somebody's head. Psalm 23 You anoint my head with oil.

She anoints his feet. She's so humble. She doesn't even anoint his head. She anoints his feet. To attend to somebody's feet was so menial.

[15 : 24] It was the job of a slave. It was the job of a servant. And of course that's not lost in Jesus. This woman sees herself as nothing but a servant.

She's filled with gratitude. She kisses his feet. She comes in a spirit of worship and adoration. Grace has broken her and she comes to worship at the feet of her Saviour.

In comparison to this cold Pharisee she is exuberant with her love. She allows her hair to hang down and of course she uses this alabaster jar of expensive ointment to anoint the feet of Jesus.

What is it saying to us? What is this picture saying to us? It's saying that Jesus came for the outcast. Jesus came for the broken, for the prostitutes, for the drug users, for the offenders, for the unclean.

God why did Jesus come for those kind of people? Well because very often these people know that they have nothing, that they have got no righteousness and that they need Christ.

[16 : 46] It's only the empty that need to be filled. It's only the sick that need a doctor. And that is why Christ was received so enthusiastically by these kind of people.

But then thirdly under this heading we see a proud host contrast the broken woman with a proud Pharisee. Simon showed no hospitality to Christ.

Simon was filled with cold curiosity to Jesus. Simon knew lots and lots of things about God but he didn't know God.

And that is a tremendous lesson for us this morning. It is possible to know lots of things about the gospel but not to know Christ. At some level Simon could see that this was a prophet but he couldn't see any beauty in Christ.

He couldn't see past Christ's appearance and the problem was for Simon he was prejudiced. Christ wasn't the prophet he hoped for.

[17 : 58] he wanted a warrior king to defeat the Romans and Christ didn't live up to his expectations. He was filled with pride and prejudice.

He was prejudiced against Christ. Jesus was the exact opposite of what the Pharisees wanted. He was humble. He was lowly.

He didn't have the trappings of a king. He ate with tax collectors and sinners. He allowed sinners to anoint him. As Isaiah says he had no form or majesty that we should look upon him and no beauty that we should desire him.

You see it takes grace to find Christ's beauty. And you see it's possible to have an outward respect for Christ but not to know him because of our pride and prejudice.

I wonder how many Simons there are here this morning. I wonder how many of us are so knowledgeable about the things of Christ but there's no beauty in Christ for us.

[19 : 16] We are filled with pride. We're filled with that critical spirit of others but we've never bowed at the feet of Jesus. We've never warmly embraced the gospel.

We've never known what it's like for love to flood our hearts. As Ryle says are we willing to enter heaven side by side with the chief of sinners and to own all your hope to free grace?

That's the lesson of Simon and this woman. But then secondly we see grace and gratitude. Jesus tells a powerful parable.

See Simon is deeply sceptical of Jesus. Now the Pharisee who had invited him saw this and said to himself if this man were a prophet.

Simon had this tick box religion didn't he? And Jesus didn't tick the boxes. That was the problem.

[20 : 23] And in this tick box religion you shunned people like this woman. You had nothing to do with her. She was a sinner. She was ceremonially unclean and you had nothing to do with her.

And if Jesus was a real prophet he would know that. So Simon concludes that either Jesus doesn't know or if he knows he doesn't care.

And either way it disqualifies him as a prophet in Simon's eyes. So what does Jesus do? He tells a parable in verses 41 to 43.

There are two debtors. One owes 50 denarii and the other owes 500 denarii. And the creditor cancels both debts.

What's Jesus telling us? He's telling us, he's showing us the nature of free grace. It doesn't matter how much righteousness you think you have. It's never enough.

[21 : 28] Whether you've got 500 or 50. The debtor graciously forgave the debtors and he generously cancelled the debt.

Jesus is getting, with pinpoint accuracy, he is getting to the heart of the gospel. How can one person have a huge debt and another person have a small debt but yet both are cancelled?

Well, the answer is the free grace and mercy of God. love. The debts aren't cancelled because of the great love that the debtors had for the creditor.

They are cancelled because of the love of the creditor. He cancels the debt and he frees them from the burden. It's the free grace and love of the creditor.

And what's the consequence? Well, the consequence is love. That's the whole point of this parable. The consequence of cancelled debt is love. And the greater the debt, the greater the love.

[22 : 36] Grace produces gratitude. Grace produces graciousness. And you see, if we are loved freely, we love freely.

Grace produces graciousness. gentleness and gratitude because our debt has been cancelled. When we were at the banner conference on Friday night, we heard a fantastic sermon from Stephen Curry on Philippians 4, verse 4.

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand. Do not be anxious about anything but in everything things.

By prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. Stephen said, how can we manage with all these qualifications, rejoice in the Lord always? Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.

Do not be anxious about anything. How can we manage that? Well, it's grace, isn't it? It's the effect of grace in a person's life that can lead us to all these different things.

[23 : 57] And then secondly, under this heading, we see seeing as Jesus sees in verse 44 to verse 46. Do you see this woman, he says? A remarkable statement.

Do you see this woman? Of course he sees this woman. He's been seeing this woman for the whole meal. You see, he's blind, isn't he? Because he can't see like Jesus sees.

His pride and his prejudice means he's completely blocked to seeing this woman like Jesus sees her. Because Jesus sees her and loves her. Simon looks at her and he hates her.

He despises her. So Jesus helps Simon out. He says, you're supposed to be my host. You're supposed to wash my feet.

You're supposed to kiss me. You're supposed to anoint me. And he's done none of these things. And you see what he's doing is he's shaming, he's embarrassing Simon.

[25 : 05] He's contrasting this proud Pharisee with this broken woman. And he's saying, she might be a great sinner, but she's recognised who I am and why I have come.

And you see, when we have grace, when we've experienced grace, we see people differently. We don't despise the person who's begging in Princess Street. We don't despise the drug user.

We love them because Christ loves them. And you see, notorious sinners like this woman, they're not shunned, but loved.

We want these notorious sinners to come to Christ. We don't want to shun them. We want to draw them, we want to love them, and we want them to come to Christ.

And then thirdly and lastly we see pardon and peace. Pardon and peace. Jesus uses the divine prerogative in verse 47.

[26 : 13] 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.

Christ uses the divine prerogative, because only God can forgive sins. He knew exactly what he was doing. He knew that they would say, who is this who even forgives sins.

Because like the whole passage, Christ is saying, I am no ordinary prophet. I am no mere prophet. I am God incarnate. I am God incarnate.

God incarnate. I am God incarnate. I am God incarnate. I am God incarnate. I am God incarnate. I am God incarnate. I think the translation here in verse 47 is perhaps better translated in the Christian standard Bible.

Therefore I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven. That's why she loved much. Christ didn't love her.

[27 : 30] Christ didn't forgive her because she loved much. She loved much because she had been forgiven. Love is the response of grace, not the cause of grace.

Love is the response and natural outflowing of grace in her life. And you see, Jesus turns to this woman and he says, your sins are forgiven.

It's likely that this woman would have experienced Christ before she came to this meal but Christ is pronouncing this benediction upon her to give her a full assurance of hope.

He was declaring her sins forgiven to give her an assurance. But he was also doing it for the benefit of other guests. He was testifying as to who he was.

And you see, this story, it starts with pride and prejudice but it ends with grace and gratitude. This woman has been justified.

[28 : 34] She's been declared innocent in the sight of God. This notorious sinner, her slate has been wiped clean.

How much theology do you think she understood at this moment in time? Very, very little. She had no concept of the cross but she knew that Christ was her saviour and that Christ was her saviour.

She saw in Christ the fulfilment of Isaiah 35 and Isaiah 61. And not surprisingly, people say, who is this that forgives sins?

The people were shocked that Jesus was claiming to be God. Christ. But you see, this passage ends with faith and peace.

Christ says, your faith has saved you. Go in peace. Notice that Christ doesn't say to her, your love has saved you. He says, your faith has saved you.

[29 : 53] There's a big difference. It's her faith that saved her. And it wasn't her personal faith, it was her faith in Christ.

Nobody's faith ever saved them. Faith always has to be in something or someone. And it was her faith in Christ that saved her. Jesus invites us to come to him and we put our faith in him.

We hold out the empty hands of faith. We've got nothing to bring. Even faith itself is a gift. And you see, Jesus dismisses her with these great words, go in peace.

Literally, it means go into peace. The Jewish rabbis used to say to the dead, go in peace. But this literally means go into peace, which is the blessing of the living, not the dead.

So what Jesus was saying was, you are now alive in a new life in Christ. Go into peace. Go and live your new, transformed life in peace, now that you've been forgiven.

[31 : 07] This woman is now more alive than she's ever been, because she's alive in Christ. And Jesus blesses her with peace. And that peace, of course, was fulfilled at the cross.

And who knows, maybe this woman saw Christ on the cross and everything began to make sense to her. she knew that peace that passes all understanding.

I'll read about it in Philippians 4. So what is Jesus saying in this passage as we just conclude? Jesus is saying, this is who I am, and this is why I have come.

And almost every problem in the church and almost every problem in our lives is because we don't understand who Jesus is, and we don't understand the true nature of the gospel. If we truly understood who Jesus was, and we truly understand the glory and wonder of the gospel, we would have much less problems than we do in our Christian lives.

Time and time again in this passage, Jesus is pointing back to the messianic promises, and he is saying, that is who I am, this is who I am. I am the fulfillment of all these messianic prophecies.

[32 : 27] Why did Jesus come? He came to bring hope, and to bring life, and to bring redemption to hopeless sinners, and to broken communities.

And if that was Christ's mission, that needs to be our mission as well. There are so many things that distract the church. Our central mission must be the preaching of good news to the poor.

And every one of us have got to ask ourselves, are we in daily contact with sinners? Are we in daily contact with sinners like this woman?

These are the people that Christ called us to reach, and to what extent are we reaching them as a church and as individuals? Christ's Christ's Christ's Christ's Christ's Christ's Christ's life.

As it makes us more Christ-like, as it makes us more gracious, as it makes us more hopefully beautiful in our character, people will be drawn to the gospel through us. Do you ever wonder what became of Simon?

[33 : 39] We don't know. Maybe he remained as a cold Pharisee for the rest of his life. Maybe forever he was unable to see vile sinners like Jesus saw them.

But the big question from this passage is, does the cold curiosity of Simon, does it seep into our hearts as well? Is that where you are today, that this is nothing but cold curiosity to you?

Or have you experienced Christ like this woman? Have you knelt at the feet of Jesus in brokenness and adoration and praise?

And have you seen the beauty of Christ for yourself? Or do you remain like the cold indifferent Pharisee? And what's the difference between the two of them? Free grace.

The free grace of God. It's the only thing that differentiates these two people. And the great question this morning is, have you embraced grace in the Lord Jesus Christ?

[34 : 48] Jesus says, come unto me all you that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. It's unimaginable to think if this woman was a prostitute, what her life would have been like before she met Jesus.

The chaos and the perversion and all the rest of it that would have been in her life. And now she has true rest and she has true peace because she has experienced free grace.

And this passage is saying to us, come out of your pride and prejudice, experience grace and gratitude, gratitude and live in pardon and peace.

Is that your experience this morning? Are you experiencing, are you living in pardon and peace? Are you living in grace and gratitude? Or are you still in pride and prejudice?

Well the invitation of Christ goes out to you this morning if you're a sinner who has been unchanged by the free grace of God. Come unto me all you that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

[35 : 53] Let's pray. Lord we thank you for these great pictures in scripture of what salvation means.

We thank you for the picture of this broken woman. We thank you for this picture of this cold Pharisee and Lord so often in life we see ourselves as that cold Pharisee. Critical.

Cold. Lord we pray that you'd melt our hearts with the free grace, with your free grace. Help us to see the beauty of Christ and help us to worship at his feet in adoration this morning.

Lord bless your word. Magnify your son we pray in our lives. In Jesus name. Amen. Let's conclude with Psalm 119 verses Psalm 119 in the Scottish Psalter.

A portion that we don't sing very often. Psalm 119 verse 173. Psalm 119 verse 173 on page 415.

[37 : 07] Let thy strong hand make help to me. Thy precepts are my choice. I long for thy salvation Lord.

And then thy law rejoice. Let's sing these verses to God's praise. Thank you.