

The Forgiven House

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: 21 August 2016

Preacher: Rev. Jeremy Graham

[0 : 00] Well, friends, I think with the help of the children, we've already gone pretty deep into this passage. But let's take some time to look at it a little bit more closely. It would be very helpful if you had your Bibles open to Luke chapter 7, beginning at verse 36.

Just before this story begins, just a few verses before in Luke chapter 7, Jesus gets a catchy new nickname. And his nickname, if you look with me, sounds like this.

Verse 34. The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, look at him, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. That's a pretty great nickname, isn't it? We've already seen in this sermon series how Jesus got his nickname.

He never turned down an invitation for dinner from anyone. And when you have a little time later, have a look through Luke's gospel. I count not less than nine different dinner parties that Jesus attends in this gospel.

[1 : 15] Have a look at, see if you can find more than nine. And we saw last week, didn't we, that Jesus, he doesn't just accept these dinner parties from all types of people because he's got a sketchy character or even that he just feels sorry for the socially outcast.

No, it's because he has a specific mission as a physician for the sin sick. Luke 5.32 I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.

But here's a question. Who are the sinners? And who is the righteous? Well, surely it's very clear who the sinners are, right? It's tax collectors like Zacchaeus and Levi.

It's men and women who can't keep ritually clean and they can't obey the law. And it's got to be pretty clear who the righteous ones are. They're upstanding men in the community like Simon the Pharisee.

So isn't it nice of Simon, gracious of him, to invite Jesus to this dinner party? He's heard the nicknames, but he's an open-minded fellow.

[2 : 26] And, you know, Jesus has been saying and doing some pretty amazing things. So let's have him over for dinner and we'll measure up the man. And after all, he might even be a prophet. And that would be pretty cool to have a real prophet at my dinner party.

And then, right in the middle of this great party, everything's going really well. We see verse 37. Have a look with me now. Behold, a woman of the city who was a sinner, when she learned that Jesus was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment. Standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. The hair of her head kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.

Here's a woman, likely a prostitute. And she's spoiled a good party. She's made everyone feel uncomfortable and unclean. And even worse than that, it's now abundantly clear to Simon that Jesus is not really who he was cracked up to be.

He really does, after all, deserve that nickname, friend of tax collectors and sinners. And so verse 39 says, When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he saw the woman's actions.

[3 : 46] He said to himself, not out loud, If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner. So let's give Simon's house a name.

We'll call it the righteous house. Or maybe better, the self-righteous house. And there's no room for hospitality or love towards someone like this sinner.

Her sin is like a contagious disease. She needs to be removed as quickly as possible before the infection can spread. But then in verse 40, Jesus speaks for the first time in the story.

And he says, Simon, I have something to say to you. And Simon answered, Say it, teacher. And then we get Jesus' parable of the two debtors, which we've already talked about.

And this parable, it drops like a bomb right in the middle of the room. Because it completely turns upside down everything that Simon thought he understood about the way the world works.

[4 : 48] Simon thought that there was a sinner in his presence. And she was a blight on his self-righteous identity. And Jesus tells him, Her name is not sinner anymore.

Have a look at verse 47 with me. This is the key verse for this passage. And I want to change the translation a little bit just to make it a little bit more clear what Jesus is saying here.

So listen closely. Verse 47, Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which are many, have been, have been forgiven.

And not for, but therefore, or hence, or as a result, she loved much. Let me say that again.

Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven.

As a result, therefore, she loves much. But, he who is forgiven little, loves little. Jesus says, Simon, you're right.

[5 : 45] There is a dirty sinner here in your midst. But it's not the woman anointing my feet. Her new name is forgiven. And the proof of her forgiveness is seen in her loving action towards me as she anoints my feet with this costly perfume.

And Jesus says, the only sinner you need to worry about here tonight is you, Simon. And I came here to offer you the same forgiveness that this woman has already received.

I wonder, did you notice a very important detail in the parable? Both debtors could not pay their debt.

The dollar amount was actually of secondary importance. The main point isn't that Simon has lived a pretty decent life and therefore he only owes God 50 denarii. You know, at least he doesn't owe a whopping 500 like that prostitute over there.

No, the main point is that Simon, like all of us, is a sinner with no hope of ever living up to the righteousness standards of God. And the punishment for an unpaid debt in the first century wasn't just repeated calls from a collections agency.

[7 : 02] No, the punishment was imprisonment, the loss of everything. The punishment was really death. And the punishment for sin is also death.

You see, the debtor needs to have his debt forgiven or cancelled. And there's only one way that that can happen. The money lender has to take the hit for him. The debt doesn't just vanish.

No, when the money lender forgives the debt, he takes the financial loss. And when our Heavenly Father forgives our sins, it comes at the greatest possible cost to him.

The cost of his own son, Jesus' life, poured out for us on the cross. And he died so that we might live. And this, friends, is the big surprise of this story.

That Simon begins as the righteous Pharisee who is disgusted by this sinful woman's contamination of his righteous home. But from the lips of Jesus, Simon discovers that it is he himself who is the sinner in need of repentance.

[8 : 14] And the woman standing before him has been, in fact, forgiven and transformed by the grace of God into a newly reborn daughter of God. And it is his own sin that stands unforgiven.

Because the Gospel never asks us to compare ourselves to one another. There's nothing but pride or shame if you walk down that road.

Instead, it offers us the eyes to see ourselves and others the way that Jesus sees us. So what a question Jesus asks in verse 44. Have a look.

Verse 44. Turning towards the woman, he said to Simon, Simon, do you see this woman? Simon, do you see this woman?

Simon did not see her. He did not see a person there. He saw sin. And he saw a distasteful history. But Jesus sees her whole self and he knows her and he loves her and he even sees how much she sinned.

[9 : 24] Did you notice he said her sins are many. He's not overlooking, sweeping it under the carpet. He sees her whole self and he gives her forgiveness.

Complete forgiveness. He gives all his forgiven children the gift then to see others with these eyes to love others in the way that we are incapable of loving one another without his spirit's transforming power.

And if you've never heard this invitation from Jesus before, hear it now for the first time.

Jesus says, come, follow me and your new name will be forgiven. And I will give you my Holy Spirit and we will never be apart. Experience my peace and my joy and my love for you.

And learn how to love others as I have first loved you. Learn how to forgive others as I have first forgiven you. And friends, if you've walked with Jesus for many years, it's so easy for you and I to stand in the place of Simon.

[10:37] My own father, who's been a missionary for 40 years now, I told him what I was preaching on this week and he said to me, I'm always undone by the realization that the characters in the gospel with whom I have the most in common are the Pharisees.

And we slip so easily from our new name, forgiven, back into our old name, self-righteous. And sometimes we do this because of pride. We refuse to admit that we can't pay the debt on our own by working harder.

After all, in every other area of our life, our hard work ethic has been enough so that we've never needed anyone's charity or any handouts. After all, I've always worked hard and earned everything I've got, thank you very much, we say.

Or we turn back to our old name, self-righteous, because of shame or because of guilt. We don't think we deserve such a beautiful free gift after everything wrong that we've done.

There has to be strings attached, right? There has to be. Or finally, we turn away because we recognize, actually, we actually recognize that Jesus is calling us here to walk with him on a very costly road.

[11:55] If we had more time, I wish I could talk about all the ways in which this act by this woman, this loving action, is so costly for her. We decide that there must be an easier way that doesn't require so much self sacrifice in loving others.

And perhaps if you have been struggling with loving someone in your life self-sacrificially, perhaps the best question to ask right now is not how do I train myself to love that person better, but rather have I been forgiven much?

Have I truly experienced Jesus' life-transforming words? Your sins have been forgiven, past tense, perfect, done. Your faith has saved you.

Go in peace. We cannot even begin to love one another in this self-sacrificial way until we hear these words. Whatever causes us to slip away from our identity as forgiven, Jesus' invitation is the same.

He says, those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. And these words never stop being good news for our ears.

[13:20] And I leave them with you now as we pray together one more time. And I want to pray this prayer of repentance that was written by St.

Augustine. Would you pray with me? Heavenly Father, my heart is like a house, small for you to enter, but I ask you to enlarge it.

It is in ruins, but I ask you to remake it. And it contains much that you will not be pleased to see.

And this I know and I do not hide from you.

Amen.