

Luke 7:36-50

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[0 : 00] So Luke chapter 7. Now we have been seeing how Jesus engages with real people in Luke's gospel. We started with Zacchaeus. Remember? And the main tune, the main flavor of the way Jesus treats people is just sheer kindness and grace. And it changes the people he meets. With Zacchaeus, his grace changes Akchaeus from being a greedy, selfish man to being a generous and kindly man.

And last week, the man who was let through the roof, the paralyzed man, changes to be someone who not only can walk but has his sins forgiven. And it's just, it's beautiful through Luke's gospel.

And you might say, well, if it's so nice, why doesn't everyone respond to Jesus like that? Why do so many people in Luke's gospel try and keep Jesus at arm's length? And the answer is here in chapter 7. And the answer is simply this, that we want Jesus to dance to our tune. We want Jesus to jump when we say jump. We have an agenda for Jesus and we want Jesus to fit into our life rather than us fitting into what he is doing. Let me show you. Right before this passage, Jesus explains. So go chapter 7, verse 31, please. In the left-hand column there. This is Jesus explaining.

To what then shall I compare the people of this generation? And what are they like? They are like children singing in the marketplace and calling to one another, we played the flute for you and you didn't dance. We sang a dirge and you did not weep. You see what Jesus is saying?

Every generation calls to Jesus and says, you just don't dance to our tune. You won't sing our song. You're not happy about the things we're happy about and you're not sad about the things that we're sad about.

[2 : 10] It's like you come from a different world and we don't like it. It's a brilliant picture of the marketplace because the marketplace works by debt and obligation. We play, you dance. We sing, you sing.

But it's shallow and it's superficial and it's got no place for sin and no place for grace and it completely gets Jesus wrong. So when Jesus comes into the world seeking and saving the lost, the world says that's the wrong song.

Don't you know that all the things we're doing in the marketplace are to palliate that sense of lostness? And that brings us to the dinner in the house of Simon the Pharisee.

It's an amazing contrast, this dinner, and I just want to show you some details from it and commend it to you. I found this story a great help this week, particularly where there are areas in my own life that are cold and frosty toward God.

This event exposes what it means to respond to Jesus with authenticity, what a real response is that Jesus is after.

[3 : 28] And there are two people who are dancing to two completely different tunes. One who's religious, who's desperately trying to keep Jesus at arm's length, and the other who has just been transformed by the forgiveness of Jesus Christ, that she has this unsettling, shocking freedom.

She no longer cares what people think of her. And it's quite something, I think, when you think the fact that Jesus is invited into a Pharisee's house. I mean, you think this would be a big opportunity.

Simon wants to think of himself as pretty open-minded. Simon the Pharisee, yes, I'm happy to have contact with Jesus. But he's not really open to change. He wants to keep everything contained.

And the shallowness of his convictions are quickly exposed by this woman from the city. You know, in those days when you went to a meal, you didn't sit on seats.

You lay on benches around a long table. And as soon as the meal starts, in verse 37, when we're told a woman from the city, a notorious sinner, we don't know what that means exactly, she finds her way to where Jesus is sitting.

[4 : 42] And she comes up behind him. And while everyone is politely eating their lamb and matzo balls, she begins to weep. And she's not weeping just a little bit.

Her tears are flooding down so that they wet Jesus' feet. She takes her hair out, which is a highly unusual thing for a woman to do in that culture. She bends down and Jesus' feet, which are filthy, they wore sandals in those days, are now saturated by her tears.

She begins to wipe his feet away, wipe the water away with her hair. Then she kisses his feet, which is just astonishing.

And then she takes out this ointment and anoints his feet. It's hard to imagine how extravagant and unselfconscious this is.

It's just a beautiful, uncalculating thing to do. It's the opposite of transactional manipulation. It's the overflowing expression of love.

[5 : 51] And Simon is disgusted. Has this woman lost her mind completely? This wretched woman has shattered my dinner party.

There's no excuse for this outpouring of emotion. So free from convention. So lighthearted. So joyful. There's nothing in life that's this important to interrupt my dinner party.

And in his heart he despises the woman and he despises Jesus and he quickly write him off. What's going on? The lovely thing is Jesus explains.

And that little parable which we heard earlier in verses 41 and verse 42. Basically, Jesus is teaching us that she loves a great deal because she's had her sins already forgiven.

Her outward devotion and her overwhelming love is because she's grasped the depth of Christ's love and forgiveness for her.

[6 : 52] And that is true for every believer. For every believer who demonstrates this extravagant love. It comes out of a sense of forgiveness. For Simon, forgiveness was irrelevant.

He thought he was a good man, didn't really need forgiveness. And just listen to this as the story slows. In verse 40, Jesus says, Simon, I have something to say to you.

Okay, say it, teacher. Verse 41. A certain money lender had two debtors. One owed 500 denarii, the other 50. Not a lot of money. But when they couldn't pay, he cancelled the debt of both.

Now, which would love him more? And Simon says, well, you know, I suppose the one who had the larger debt cancelled.

And just think about this, how brilliant this parable is. Jesus is saying there are two worlds, there are two ways of doing things. One is about debt and obligation and the other is about love.

[7 : 58] And the way you move from a life of debt and obligation to a life of love is through forgiveness. Through having your debt cancelled. Isn't that wonderful?

So two people in debt, both of them can't pay it. It's a familiar Bible picture of the Christian, of just the human predicament.

Because we owe God everything, but we can't pay it. I mean, we owe to God our worship, our lives, our thoughts, our best of everything.

And every moment we don't give him the greatest glory, our debt increases. Something happens in this little parable that changes everything.

Something that never happens in the marketplace. The money lender cancels the debt of both of these people. And the word cancel is the most beautiful little word. It's the word for grace.

[8 : 54] The money lender graces both of these people and completely joyfully wipes out all their debt. And it is the cancellation of the debt from where love comes.

And that's exactly what happens when Jesus forgives us. When he takes our sins away from us. When he doesn't treat us according to our sins.

When he takes the load and weight of our debts onto himself on the cross. And cleans us. And welcomes us. And frees us. And the reason Jesus has come from heaven is, of course, to deal with the debt that we could never do.

And he doesn't do it on the fact, on the ability of us to pay. He does it out of his kindness. And I wonder if you've ever thought about how deeply in debt to God you are.

Or have you glimpsed just how much and how freely he has forgiven you? Because it is in the forgiveness of our sins that our identity itself is changed from being debtors to being lovers.

[10 : 03] There's freedom in forgiveness that's born of love. And the greater our grasp on the forgiveness we have in Christ, the greater our love.

And the greater our freedom of expressing our love for him. Which means, if there are areas in our love where we're frosty like Simon.

Where our love is blocked either to others or to God. We need to go back to this fundamental of forgiveness. Simon shows he's still a slave. He doesn't want to move out of that world of obligation.

And you can hear his distaste. He says, well, I suppose it's the person who's had more forgiven. You see, he's not really open to forgiveness.

He wants convictions that will cost him nothing. He wants to keep Jesus at arm's length. He's going to do everything for self-protection. He's such a West Coast person.

[11 : 03] He's guarded. He's uncommitted. He can't imagine anything in the world that's so important that he would let down his armor. And then, very worryingly, Jesus implies this in verses 44 to 47.

He says to Simon, do you see this woman? He said, I came into your house. You gave me no water for my feet. But she's wet her feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.

You gave me no kiss. But she has continued to kiss my feet. You have not anointed my head with oil, but she's anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven.

For she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little. I think most people think that the way to hell is paved with really bad sins, big things we've done wrong.

But I think it's more true to say that what brings us down is the things that we have not done. And on the Day of Judgment, it's going to be a great surprise to many to hear Jesus say, That's the tragedy of this story.

[12 : 34] I just, you imagine for just a moment, Simon could see what was going on. He could see that before him is the Lord of glory, the Son of God, who has come into the world to take away the load of his sin.

And just out of love and out of grace. And that he's about to go to Jerusalem where he would die in Simon's place to give him eternal life. If Simon had caught a glimpse of it, maybe he would have broken down in tears.

And maybe he would have offered himself in love to Christ as well. But he doesn't. And therefore, he disappears from the story. Before I finish, let me just give the kids a warning.

Boys and girls, in just a moment I'm going to come and ask you to show, one or two of you to show your words. But I'm just going to finish talking about it. So what did we learn from this?

Christianity at its very heart is about the wonder of forgiveness. forgiveness. All based on the sheer kindness of Jesus Christ. And this is what we crave.

[13 : 43] It is in the freedom of forgiveness that love is born. And forgiveness is the lifeblood of the Christian faith and the lifeblood of love for God and for one another.

That's why every service we have, we seek to confess our sins and remember the forgiveness of Christ. And I think we have to remember as well that there's something a little unsettling and even shocking about true forgiveness.

God doesn't just excuse sin and say, boys will be boys and girls will be girls. God looks at sin in the face, but he treasures the sinner in such a way as that he separates us from our sin and Christ takes our sin on him so that we'll be drawn back to him.

This is what the woman knew. Here is a woman weighed down with pain and struggle and doubt and disappointment who'd been used and used others, full of shame and regret, but somewhere Christ had forgiven her sin and she could barely believe the grace of God to her.

And what a change it's made. She can't hold anything back from Jesus. She cannot overexpress her love and gratitude to him. And so Jesus gives her that assurance in verses 48 to 50 that he gives to all of us who bring our sins to him.

[15 : 09] Your sins have been forgiven. This is the way of peace. This is the way of freedom. And this is the way of salvation. Amen.