

Luke 7 v 40-48

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[0 : 00] I didn't realize how much of an overlap there would be between the passage that I chose this evening and what we've already heard, but then I'm not in control. We are not in control.

The Lord is, and we're going to see so much that is similar in what happened to this woman when she came to know Jesus as her Savior to what we've heard this evening in the life of our friend.

Entirely different part of the world, different century, a different millennium, and yet the same thing is happening. Someone is being forgiven and someone is coming to know Jesus and their life is being changed. So this passage here that is well known to us, Luke chapter 7, verse 41, where verse 40, rather, Jesus answering said to him, Simon, I have something to say to you. He answered, say it, teacher.

A certain money lender had two debtors. One owed 500 denarii, the other 50. When they could not pay, he canceled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?

Simon answered, the one I suppose may cancel the larger debt. And he said to him, you have judged rightly. Then turning towards the woman, he said to Simon, do you see this woman? I entered your house. You gave me no water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in, she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. 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.

It is so crucially important to read the Bible correctly. I guess there are several ways in which we can read the Bible, but there is only one way in which it is right to read the Bible, in which we're going to hear the voice of God. That's when we recognize that this is how God speaks to us. And I hope this evening that having heard a real live example of how a person can be lifted out of the depths and the shame of a sinful life, so that it's by the Lord himself to serve God, we are going to go back to the Bible to hear about how another person was lifted out of the depths of shame to serve and to follow Jesus Christ. So tonight, I hope more than anything else that we'll not just be taking what we want out of this passage. The passage and all its details are not there just to tell us of something interesting that happened while Jesus was in the world. Not just an unusual story or a story that was worth writing down. I'm sure from many angles it was a story. Here is this man, there's something almost paradoxical about it. Here is this respected religious man who decides to invite Jesus into his home for a respectable, noble dinner. And while everything is going, who knows what kind of questions he was asking Jesus and what the subject of the conversation was. But it was all interrupted and dreadfully spoiled, according to the man himself, by this woman who burst in and she was crying. She wiped the feet of Jesus with her hair and she kissed his feet. These were marks, of course, of great affection and not just respect, but something very special was going on in that culture. We are meant to see that there is a tremendous contrast between the two people in this story. Two people who have been brought together by Jesus.

[4:12] Unbeknown to Simon, this woman was going to come in. But these two people are entirely different from one another. One of them represents the religious class in his day, the Pharisees, who were well known in that culture for their keeping of the law of Moses, at least from the outside. They did all the right things. And if God was going to judge a person by what he did on the outside, then the Pharisees were way ahead of everyone else and everyone knew it. But God does not judge on what he sees from the outside. He looks into our hearts. He knows what our hearts are and he knows whether we are right with God in our hearts. That's where it begins.

The woman, on the other hand, as far as the outside was concerned, she was on the opposite end of the social spectrum and indeed the religious spectrum. For her, there was no hope. She was a waster.

She had a reputation. We're not told what kind of reputation. I don't think it takes too much imagination to guess the kind of reputation that she had. Everyone knew what kind of a woman she was.

So she was the last person, as far as Simon was concerned, that he would ever expect to come and have anything to do with Jesus. What was more puzzling, as far as Simon was concerned, was that she was the last person that he would ever expect Jesus would have anything to do with because of who she was and what kind of life she lived, the shame and the darkness and the hopelessness, the open sin with which this woman was and which this woman was guilty. Everyone knew it. She knew it. The society knew it.

Our family knew it. That you couldn't get a greater difference in terms of the social spectrum or in terms of the religious spectrum. And yet Jesus turned it all around.

[6:17] And he showed Simon that he was wrong in one fatal assumption that he made.

And it was this, that religion or God was for good people. Jesus came into the world to show that God loves bad people. We've already heard it this evening.

I have come not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Simon prided himself in being righteous, doing everything, taking all the right boxes, doing everything as it should be done.

If God is not going to accept a person like thee, then what hope is there for anyone else? And he doesn't accept anyone if he won't accept me. That was Simon's thinking. That God accepts a person on the basis of the kind of life that they live.

But the problem with that is, where do you draw the line? How can I truly know? If that's what you think this evening, if you are a Simon, and there are many Pharisees still in this world, who think that God is going to accept them on the basis of their life.

[7:34] How do you know that? How do you know how acceptable your life is? Or are you just going on, on the assumption that, well, I'll do my best and hope for the best.

I'll live the most righteous, respectable, good life I can, and surely God will see to all the rest. And if he doesn't accept me, then who is he going to accept?

That's the tragic mistake that Simon was making. He believed that he was accepted. He rather assumed that his life was acceptable to God.

And so therefore, he felt he was in a position to look down on this poor woman who came in, in tears. He felt that he was in a position to compare his life with her.

Because he made the assumption in his heart, if this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who was touching him, for she is a sinner.

[8:35] Instant comparison. Perhaps you're making the same mistake this evening. It's a tragic mistake. One in which, if we continue to make it, it will lead to a lost eternity.

Because one day you will discover that God does not judge us on the basis. He does not accept us, rather, on the basis of how we have lived our lives on the outside in this world.

Because the fact is, none of us have lived the kind of life that God requires from us. Every single one of us is a sinner in the eyes of God.

And Simon needed to find this out. And so the Lord Jesus told him this parable. And the parable is difficult to understand. It's also easy to come to a wrong understanding of the story.

And that's why I'd like just to look at it very, very carefully. Jesus said to him, A certain money lender had two debtors. One owed 500 denarii, and the other 50.

[9 : 45] So you had two debtors. One of them owes 500 denarii, which in today's money is something like 2,800 pounds. And the other owes, that's the 50 denarii.

The 500 denarii is 10 times that amount, so that's 28,000 pounds. There's quite a difference between the two. One's 2,800, and the other is 28,000.

When they could not pay, said Jesus, he canceled the debt of both. Now, which of them will love him more? And Simon, of course, it was a no-brainer for him.

He answered, The one, I suppose, for whom he canceled the larger debt. And he said to him, You have judged rightly. But even in coming to the right conclusion, he was condemning himself, and I'll tell you why.

Simply for this, because even although one of the debtors owed more than the other, they were both bankrupt.

[10 : 51] You see, at the end of the day, you can get two people who owe two different amounts of money. But if they both have nothing to pay, if neither of them has anything to pay, then they're both in exactly the same condition.

And Simon simply failed to see that point. He looked at his own life in comparison with the woman. And as far as he was concerned, his life was so much superior to the woman.

But what he didn't realize was that he was actually in the same condition. Bankrupt. He had nothing to pay. And that meant that they were both in exactly the same position before God.

Except that the woman realized the condition that she was in. You see, ultimately, there are two types of people in this world. There are those who are sinners and try to avoid it.

And those who are sinners and who come to know that and who come to run to Jesus for forgiveness. And that's what this woman was. Somehow or other, she had got to know about Jesus.

[12 : 07] Somehow her eyes and her heart had been opened. And she realized that as drastic and as shameful her life was, that there was forgiveness in God.

You can't logically explain it, can you? Why should God, who is of pure eyes than to behold iniquity, that's what the Bible says about him.

God who is other, who is ultimately perfect within himself, and who hates sin, why should he, what logical process is there in which God comes down into this world in the person of Jesus Christ, in order to rescue people who are trapped and who are dead in their sins.

And yet, she somehow came to understand that that's who Jesus was and that that's why he had come into the world, to seek and to say.

Maybe it was something that he said. Maybe she had heard him saying, come to me, all you who labor, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Maybe she had heard him surrounding himself with the tax collectors and the sinners of the day, and maybe she had heard him saying, well, we have already heard tonight that he didn't come to call the righteous, but he came to call sinners to repentance.

[13 : 37] And she realized that this was a light in her darkness. This was God having come into the world and offering that complete forgiveness which only God can bring to every one of us.

And he ultimately did that by giving his life on the cross. We get very confused, don't we, by the word sinner.

That's a word that many people think is old-fashioned. Other people laugh at that word. They think that it's not relevant in today's world. They think that it's a religious term that's found in the Bible and that we really have evolved beyond that word or that idea.

But I'm not concerned what people and how people think of what a sinner is. My concern this evening is what does God think?

My concern is what does God think of me? And your concern above everything else should be the same. How do I stand this evening at the last Sunday of 2013?

[14:53] Where do I stand in relation to God? Am I still a sinner? Because if I am, I'm estranged from God. I'm separated from God.

The Bible tells us that our sins have separated us from God. And that means I'm condemned before God. It means that when I appear before him after I leave this earth, there can only be one consequence.

The wages of sin is death. Jesus warned the people that when the day would come when he would say to those on his left-hand side, depart from me, you workers of iniquity, into everlasting darkness.

We are one step closer tonight to that moment when we all have to appear before his judgment seat. And I'm not trying to take advantage of the occasion.

I'm simply bringing to you what the Bible says. It says it every day. If we look at it every day. And if we care to listen to what God is saying to us, and if we accept that he's talking about us, not just one particular cultural group way back 2,000 years ago, but ourselves, the gospel is as relevant today.

[16:09] It's not just relevant for Stornoway and for Israel. It's relevant for Kathmandu and for Nepal, for India, for all over the world. And God is still working in people's hearts and bringing them to that same place where the woman was, where she was made to see her need of forgiveness.

in order to be right with God. A sinner simply means a debtor. It means someone who is in debt.

And when you're in debt, you owe money. Now, for the most part, I guess that when we're in debt, if my mobile phone needs to be paid, I just pay it. If I owe 20 pounds, 30 pounds for the contract, well, it perhaps doesn't take me long to just pay the bill.

But what happens when you can't pay and when the debt goes up, day after day, it accumulates.

With every day that I live, my debt accumulates. And if I don't have the means to pay, then I'm bankrupt.

[17:16] And that's what this woman knew by the kind of life that she had lived away from God. She knew the wrong that she had done, the mess that her life was in.

The problem is that Simon's life was also a mess. Except it was, if you like, a tidy mess. If there is such a thing as a tidy mess, I think you know what I mean.

He had convinced himself that his life wasn't in a mess because he was doing all the right things. But he was just as much in debt as she was.

The problem is he didn't realize it. She did. And it was in that moment of realization, the moment that we heard about already tonight, where Jesus breaks our heart and comes in and opens our eyes and gives us to see the change that he can bring in us and the change that he died to bring about in our hearts by giving himself on the cross and by going to the ultimate extent in order to pay the debt.

You see, when you're in debt, someone has to pay. You've got no money. The only way you can get out of the debt is for someone to pay. And that's exactly what happened.

[18 : 42] And that's what happened when Jesus came into the world. That's the only way in which he could forgive and bring about that cleansing that he can bring in a person's life.

And that meant that as soon as the woman saw who Jesus was and what he could do for her, that all her shame and her guilt could be taken away, then she brought herself to him and everything that she had and that she owned and surrendered her life to him.

That is what God is asking of you tonight. Complete, total surrender.

how can we do otherwise? When you come to see that God has done for us and he has given us the greatest gift that anyone could give which is everlasting life.

When you come to see that Jesus is death on the cross is the payment for all the shame and the darkness that we have been guilty of. how can we continue to live away from God when God invites us freely to himself and tells us and asks us and commands us to come to him to receive that forgiveness that he alone has died to bring us.

[20 : 21] When God forgives, that forgiveness is like no other forgiveness that we can ever experience in this life. The world is full of forgiveness.

Two people fall out with each other. One of them goes to the other and says, look, I've done wrong with you, please, can we move on? I really, I would like us to put the past behind us and the other person says, yes, okay, let's go on with it.

That's as far as we can go in this life, isn't it? But when God does that, he doesn't just let bygones be bygones. He doesn't just sweep it under the carpet.

He doesn't just say, well, let's draw a line, we've been long enough at this, we'll just carry it, we'll just, because life is too short to live it, log it, that's not the way he does it. When you sin against God, we incur guilt, we become guilty.

All of us here tonight, we are guilty. And God is the only one who can wipe that slate clean and take away the guilt.

[21 : 24] He's the only one with the authority. How do I know that? Because the price has been paid at Calvary. And that means God can come to me tonight and say, your sins, just like this woman, your sins are forgiven.

When God says that to someone, he means that your guilt in its entirety is wiped clean. you are given a new life, a new dimension, a new heart, a new purpose, a new belonging.

And that's what the Apostle Paul meant when he said that if anyone is in Jesus, is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things are passed away and behold, everything has become new.

I suppose that if you had asked Suraj some years ago when he was on the streets in Kathmandu, if you had told him that one day he'd be standing in a church telling how Christ changed his life, he would never have believed it.

But that's the reality of what God can do through the Lord Jesus in a person's life. And you don't have to belong to a gang in Nepal. You don't have to have a, whatever our background is.

[22 : 45] we are sinners. Whether we've had a sheltered upbringing, whether we've fallen into bad company, and whether we've in bad habits, or become addicted, or whatever, God can change us.

And he can give us a new beginning. Because essentially what God is saying to us this evening is the same as he says to us every time we come to open the pages of the Bible.

he's saying to us, you need new software, if I can put it like that, for the sake of most of us here who know what I'm talking about.

I have a computer at home, and I turned it on quite recently, and a light came on and said, your software needs to be changed. The first thing I did was just ignore the light.

But then I switched on the next day, and the same light came on. Your software needs to be changed.

[23 : 52] And I said to myself, I'm happy with the software I've got. I'm used to it. I'm accustomed to it. I don't want to have to look at new icons, and new colors, and a new way of doing things.

I'm just, I'm long in the tooth. I want to just keep things the way I have. You see, the reality was that the manufacturer was telling me this. And that's what I couldn't get away from.

The maker, whatever, however I objected and resisted, and however much I wanted to keep things the way they were, the manufacturer is telling me, I need new software.

Your old software is corrupt. corrupt. And that's what God is saying to us this evening. Your heart is corrupt. If you leave it the way it is, yes, that's what you're used to, and you, I know that you prefer the way you are, but it's going to die.

God wants to give us a life that will never end, by changing us from within. But I had to click the button that said, do you wish to download your new software?

[25 : 13] When I clicked that button, a question came up, are you sure you want to download this software? Eventually, I said, yes.

the Lord is saying to us tonight, exactly the same. It's for you if you'll take it.

It's free. The Bible says without money and without price, it is the gift of God. And faith is when we take God at his word and come to him.

and accept what he can do for us. Let's bow our heads in prayer. Father in heaven, we thank you for this evening and for your word to us and the change that you can bring in a person's life.

We thank you for the power of the Holy Spirit. And we thank you that we can hear our brothers and sisters from various parts of the world coming from time to time and telling of the work of the gospel, the most important power in all the world.

[26 : 25] God, and we pray, Lord, for that work. And we ask that you will continue to change people like the woman we were thinking about this evening. Who knows what kind of life she led, and yet her life was transformed.

And who knows what happened in the Pharisee? We don't know. We ask, Lord, that whether we are open sinners or whether we are Pharisees trying to hide our sin and trying to live the most respectable life that we can, Lord, we pray that you will expose us for what we are and bring us to know the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior and change us from within.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.