

Who is This, Who Even Forgives Sins?

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[0 : 00] Let's now turn for a short time to the passage we read in Luke, Luke chapter 7, looking at the verses 36 through to 50. There are two questions within this passage that Luke, I think, has used as the spine or backbone to the teaching of the passage.

The first one is in verse 44, where Jesus turned to this woman and said to Simon, do you see this woman?

In other words, he is calling Simon the Pharisee's attention to this woman, because he saw her in the most basic sense, with his eyes. But Jesus is really saying, have you given attention to her and to what she has done?

Do you see this woman? That raises the question for ourselves, how do we view people? Do we just see them outwardly?

Is there anything else about them that we should take note of? Do we stop to take a rightful interest in them? The second question is in verse 49, a question that appears regularly throughout the Gospel of Luke.

[1 : 21] Luke, who is this who even forgives sins? One of the great purposes in Luke's writing of the Gospel is to present Jesus to us, and in presenting Jesus, to put it in the form of this question regularly throughout the Gospel, different ways in which the question is asked, but it's pretty much come to the same thing.

Who is this man? Who is this person? What is he about? Why is he significant? So that's the question, the second question, around which the teaching of the passage is built.

And these two questions really will form our headings for today. They're very important questions for ourselves, and we'll look at some of the points that Luke has built around these.

Do you see this woman? Now we learn from the passage that this woman had a reputation. We're not told exactly what is involved in the fact that she was a sinner.

Verse 37, a woman of the city who was a sinner. But she was very likely somebody who lived an immoral life, who followed an immoral lifestyle in some form or other, and would have been known as such to people, and known as such indeed to Simon the Pharisee himself.

[2 : 41] As we'll see, he said, within himself, in his own thoughts, in his inner thoughts about Jesus. If he knew who this woman was, and what type of woman she is, as a sinner about Jesus, he was saying, he wouldn't have touched her.

He wouldn't have actually done this. There are no details. Whatever her lifestyle was like, she had come into this particular house, into this company.

It would have been easy enough to do that, because in those days, the outer door would have been open, and she would have made her way through into where this gathering with Simon the Pharisee and Jesus was actually situated in the house.

But you notice she came behind him, weeping. She came with a flask of ointment to anoint Jesus.

When she learned that he was reclining there at table in the Pharisee's house, she brought this alabaster flax, which would have been very expensive. And then we read that, Standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

[4 : 00] That may seem a very strange practice, a strange thing to do for us in our society, in our particular way of doing things nowadays. But this would have been very common in these days to wash somebody's feet, something, of course, Jesus himself used in John chapter 13 as an illustration, in order to convey how he himself had come to take the place of a servant, indeed of a slave, if you like, and taking the lowest place and the most demeaning tasks, in order to accomplish salvation for us as people.

And here, really, the woman is pretty much taking that position. She has come weeping. She's obviously upset. She's come in some sort of recognition of who Jesus is and of her need of him.

As we'll see in a minute, she exercised faith, as Jesus himself said. But as she came behind him, and as she stooped at his feet, and began to wet his feet with her tears.

Her tears fell onto his feet. She was weeping copiously. And then she wiped them with the hair of her head. And then she kissed his feet and then anointed them with the ointment.

She was taking the position of what a slave would do in washing the feet of a guest. But she was washing his feet with her tears, as well as with this ointment that she then applied to his feet.

[5 : 30] And all of that was because she loved Jesus deeply. Verse 47, you can see how Jesus himself puts it. Therefore I tell you, her sins which are many are forgiven, for she loved much.

Now that doesn't mean that she came into this house and that her love for Jesus was the cause of his forgiving of her sins. It's the other way about. She had her sins forgiven.

Jesus assured us, we read near the end of the passage, that her sins were indeed forgiven. That he had forgiven her sins. That she was pardoned. That her guilt was removed.

And it is out of that knowledge, out of that experience of Christ as the sin, as the forgiver of her sins, that she actually exercised her love.

This was a great act of love on her part. Taking this position, doing this to him, was a great act of her love in response to his forgiveness.

[6 : 29] That's really something that is so significant for us to take note of today. It's not that much we love Jesus in a sense that's important, but that we love him out of an experience and sense of having our sins forgiven.

That we love him because we know him as the one who has dealt with our sin, who has pardoned our iniquity, who has dealt with every aspect of our sin, and at the very most basic level, has died for our sins.

Because that's what was involved in his coming into the world. That's why he came into the world. He came to die the death that he died on the cross, the death which we deserved, the death which is indeed sin's wages, what we had brought on ourselves due to our sin, our rebellion against God.

The Son of God was sent by God the Father, and he came willingly to die the death which we deserved. And he died that death. Why did he die? To save us from our sins.

That's what's so sad about distortions of the gospel today, when instead of really saying to me and to you, God is actually saying that as a sinner who has offended God, you require his forgiveness.

[7 : 53] We all too often hear, well, it's not really like that nowadays. It's just coming to a sense that your sin, if it really exists meaningfully, has been forgiven anyway by what Jesus did on the cross.

You don't need a personal experience. You don't need a personal renewal in yourself. You don't need to be born again. You don't need to repent. You don't need to come to Jesus. You don't need to place your trust and faith in him and to give your life over to him.

That's not what Jesus says. That's not what the Bible tells us. Here is a woman who loved him so deeply because he had dealt with her sin, because he had forgiven her sin.

And of course, as we said in John chapter 13, when Jesus came to wash the feet of the disciples, we've mentioned this previously. In the context there, John very carefully tells us that he put off his outer garments and girded himself.

He wrapped himself with a towel, as a slave would do, washing the feet of a guest. And he began to wash the feet of the disciples, to which Peter, of course, initially objected.

[9 : 00] Without going into the detail of it, what that really represented, really is a parable in action, if you like, where you find that Jesus, Jesus, the Son of God, who had come into this world and taken our human nature by taking our human nature and coming to do the work of a servant of the Father to the extent that he would die that death of the cross.

Well, this is what it's about, he's saying. I have come not to be served, but to be the servant. And none of us is required to stoop so low as Jesus himself did.

Whatever Jesus requires of us, it's never going to be as low a position or as demeaning a work as he himself did in dealing with our sins.

That's the glory of the gospel that it presents to us a Savior who is a servant, who was a servant in his life in this world, and who exercised his ministry as a servant through his service, through coming to take that position in response to the Father's command.

Do you see this woman? And see Simon's conclusion. He saw her as a sinner and no further. You see what he said? The Pharisee had invited him.

[10 : 30] Verse 39, He said to himself, within himself, If this man were indeed a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.

See, here's Simon the Pharisee looking at this woman. All he sees is her reputation. All she sees is what he knew of her in the past. All he sees is just that and nothing else.

She really is just, for Simon the Pharisee, she's no more than a category. He's not looking at any of her personal needs, or what's happening before his very eyes.

He's just so caught up in his own opinion about what this woman is, and the category she belongs to, he dismisses Jesus as a prophet, simply because he's dealing with such a woman as this.

And that's a great challenge to ourselves. How often we pass people and just think of categories. People have fallen on hard times.

[11 : 40] People have a troubled lifestyle. People have addictions. People who need help. Or maybe reluctant to ask for it. People who have been helped and still gone back into old habits.

They're not categories. They're real people. They have real souls. They're like you and me in need of attention, and especially in need of God, in need of salvation, in need of forgiveness, in need of cleansing, in need of their lives being changed radically at the center of it in their hearts by Jesus Christ.

So we have to learn to look at people in terms of their need and to stop and to take note and to ask questions and not pass on too quickly and come to conclusions simply by what we know of them or known of their past.

What if somebody just came in the door right now? The worshiper wear. How would we feel? What would our reaction be? Would we be pleased?

Would we feel embarrassed? Would we welcome them to the company of worshipers here even though we knew that they look different to ourselves? Well, that's surely what we would want to be for them.

[13 : 03] That whatever kind of person with whatever lifestyle comes to the gospel and comes to be part of this congregation to worship God, that we are there for their support, for their reception, for their being hopefully a help to them towards a better way of life.

Do you see this woman? He said to Simon. And of course Simon concluded from this that Jesus himself could not be a prophet.

If this man were a prophet, he would have known who this woman is and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner. He's dismissed Jesus because of his view of this woman.

And Jesus, he thinks, can't possibly be a prophet, be the person that people are saying he is because he's touching this woman. He's dealing with this woman. What is Jesus to ourselves?

Does he fit our idea of what a savior should be? Of what a prophet should be? Of what someone who would rule our life should be?

[14 : 12] Or ask other questions related to that, how much of our life is indeed given over to Jesus? Does he fit our own conception and our own view or opinion as to what sort of savior we require?

It's different to asking the question, what sort of savior do you think you need? Do I think I need? It's the sort of savior that Jesus is, is the sort of savior Jesus, God is saying, indeed is the savior we require.

So has Jesus, is Jesus today in your experience in every part of your life? Have you accepted his lordship?

Have you accepted his right to be the lord of your life? Have you accepted his own position as one who is the only savior of sinners, able to deal with your sin in every aspect of it?

All of these questions challenge us as we read of what he said to Simon the Pharisee, do you see this woman? And you see then Jesus' response. You see her character and her actions, Simon's conclusions, and then you see Christ's response.

[15 : 32] And the first thing he does in verse 40 is get Simon's attention. Jesus answering said to him, Simon, I have something to say to you. He doesn't want Simon to go on just thinking loosely or thinking outwardly about things.

He's really concerned to pin Simon down in his thoughts, in his mind, in his conscience, so that he comes to really think deeply about what he's seeing, about what Jesus is going to say to him.

Simon, I have something to say to you. That's what God is saying to you today. That's what he's saying to me. That's what he's saying through the gospel. That's essentially what the gospel is. Here is God saying, I have something to say to you.

Are we listening to the God who is speaking to us through his word? Do we really believe in our heart of hearts that this Bible that I've opened before me is God's word to us today?

That God is actually addressing us wherever we are in our need, in our circumstances, in life, in our personality, in our relationships, in our age groups, whatever we are. God is saying, I have something to say to you today.

- [16 : 40] And aren't you coming here today with a sense of real thankfulness that God has not stopped speaking to you? That God is still addressing you? That you have come with a conviction that it is a good thing for you to listen to God and to actually hear his voice as the gospel is proclaimed, as you read his word, as you join the company of his people?
- And I have to say to myself, as I speak and preach in the name of the Lord, am I listening to God? Am I just content with speaking and conveying a message to yourselves without really listening to what God is saying?
- Have I listened to it before I started speaking? I have something to say to you, Jesus said to this man. But he didn't say it condemningly.
- That is so, so important as well. He didn't just instantly denounce Simon the Pharisee for what he had said, for what he was thinking. Well, he hadn't said anything. He had just said it in himself.
- He didn't denounce him for his thoughts, even though he was reading his thoughts. He didn't condemn him. He didn't even rebuke him as such. Instead, verses 41 to 43, he led him through an illustration.
- [17 : 57] Because the concern of Christ is to lead this man into the light. Bring him out of his Pharisee of his Pharisee of his Pharisee and his Pharisee judgmentalism into the light of the truth.
- That's why God is saying to you today, I have something to say to you. Because it's God's concern that we would all come into the light of his truth. And we would come to have our lives enlightened by his truth.
- And so he says in the illustration that he used about the debt that was cancelled, one large debt and one small debt, who, which of these two will love him the more?
- And Simon answered, the one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled, the larger debt. And Jesus said, you have judged rightly. And then turning towards the woman, he said, you see, deliberately, Luke has actually very carefully noted the most detailed actions of the event.
- Jesus, he said, turned towards the woman, although he was going to speak to Simon. That's interesting, isn't it? He turned towards the woman and then he said to Simon, do you see this woman?
- [19 : 15] He didn't want Simon to be left in any doubt as to who he was talking about and why he was focusing on her. Because what he was saying to Simon was really essentially, Simon, this woman has honoured me by what she has done and you've done nothing of the sort and all you've done is criticise her.
- Do you see this woman? And Simon's neglect and Simon's sin is actually highlighted by the woman's act of love, by her selfless devotion to Jesus.
- Well, there's the first question. Do you see this woman? And as this is happening before us in the way in which God's word is reliable in what it says to us, it's as if you and I were actually there and part of this company around this table with Jesus.
- Well, that question is now put to you and to me as well. Do you see this woman? Do you see what she did? How do you relate to that yourself? Is that something that you've already done in displaying your love for Jesus?
- Is Jesus requiring of you something today that you've not yet done and that you deeply want to do in your heart to show your love for Jesus?
- [20 : 44] We have a communion coming up shortly. Has it been on your heart for some time to do this in remembrance of Him?

And by coming to take communion, to come to the Lord's table, the Lord's Supper, you're doing effectively, essentially, in a sense, what this woman did, wiping his feet, washing his feet with her tears and wiping them with her hair and anointing him with this ointment, showing her love?

Is that what you want to do? Is that what's in your heart to do? And are you saying of yourself, I really want to do that this time? I'll do it.

Why should you hold back when the tears of your heart and repentance have already anointed the feet of Christ? when your love for Him is perhaps not anything like as large or as full as you would like it to be, but it's real?

There's real love that Jesus is looking for. Not inflated love, not false love, but real love. Do you see this woman?

[22 : 01] Second question, who is this who even forgives sins? Verse 47. from verse 47 onwards.

Well, Christ's statement here in verse 47 says, I tell you, her sins which are many are forgiven, for she loved much. He who is forgiven little, loves little. As we said, she didn't love as a means by which to buy his forgiveness.

Her love was a response to forgiveness. That's how our love for God is. It comes in response to what God has done and response to what God has done for us and what God has done in us and to us as we know him as our Savior, when we know him as our Savior.

And what he says here, your sins though many are forgiven. Just think about that. Here is this woman who is well known as a sinner in the community, is well known to Simon as a sinner, who's come into this company and actually had the audacity as Simon sees it anyway to actually do this, come up behind Jesus, wipe his feet and anoint them with ointment.

And here is Jesus turning to this woman and saying, or turning to Simon and saying, her sins which are many are forgiven. In other words, he's saying to Simon, it doesn't matter what you think about her, it doesn't matter what sort of lifestyle she's had up to now, it doesn't matter what she is like by reputation.

[23 : 32] Her sins which are many, Jesus wasn't denying the fact, Jesus wasn't trying to hide the fact of what this woman actually had been or was up to now. Her sins which are many are forgiven.

What an incentive for you and for me to seek Jesus, to seek his forgiveness, to come to ask him to wash away our sins.

If you pile all your sins together, today, even those you know, and you say to Jesus, well I know there are others that I'm not as familiar with or able to actually see clearly.

Sins regarding what I've done that I shouldn't have done, sins in regard to what I should have done that I failed to do, I'm piling them all together. I take my whole life's sins, right up to this moment.

there are nothing like as large as the heart of Jesus to forgive. There are nothing like as great in dimension as the forgiveness that's there to be received, that Jesus bestows.

[24 : 49] It doesn't matter the sin that you've done today and what people say of you or what you say of yourself. You come to Jesus as the one who forgives our sins in the sure and certain knowledge that as we come to confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness to set you before himself as if you had never sinned at all.

That's what Jesus does for us. That's what Jesus is as foundational to the forgiveness that God bestows. See what Jesus said, your sins are forgiven.

And then he said to the woman herself, your faith has saved you, go in peace. But let's look at Luke's question, who is this who forgives, even forgives sins?

Well, only God has the authority to forgive sins. That's brought out in other passages, obviously. And it's built into the way in which Luke frames the question here and sets it in this context.

Who is this who even forgives sins? It's the most remarkable thing. A human being in form, and indeed a very real human being, Jesus Christ himself.

[26 : 18] As Simon sits in his presence, sins. This is what he hears around him. Who is this man? Who is this who forgives sins?

Who even forgives sins? Well, he must be God for a start as well as man. Only God has the prerogative and the right to forgive sins.

Elders don't forgive sins. Ministers don't forgive sins. Priests don't forgive sins. The church doesn't forgive sins. They may deal with things ecclesiastically to remove the scandal of sin, to remove certain sentences imposed at certain times, but only God has the right and the authority to forgive sins.

You see, let's not just dwell on that question, on that point. It's not just a matter of God alone having the authority to forgive sins. What you must think of, and I must think of, is how ready God is to forgive.

How concerned God is to forgive your sin and my sin. How Jesus welcomes sinners into his presence when they come to receive the forgiveness that he has.

[27 : 39] Isn't that the story that you have, the parable of the prodigal in Luke chapter 15? The person receiving, the father receiving the returning prodigal, is not itself for us primarily an image of God the father, it's actually a representation of Jesus because that was the accusation of the scribes and the Pharisees at the beginning of chapter 15, they murmured, they complained about this, this man is receiving sinners and eating with them.

Yes, he is. That's what he's about. There's no reluctance on the part of Jesus to receive you as a sinner, thankfully. no reluctance to bestow forgiveness.

Nothing of the reluctance that we have to come to him is found in himself to come toward us and to invite us and to bestow that forgiveness.

Now what he says to the woman, of course, is also important and fits in with what he's saying. He said to the woman, your faith has saved you. Go in peace.

Faith is really what joins us to Jesus, if you like to put it simply. Faith is the gift of grace. Faith is something that God himself brings about, but it's still something required of us.

[29 : 09] The Bible so often calls us to note our responsibility as well as God's ability. Our responsibility what we are called to do through the gospel is to believe in Christ, to believe in the sense of trusting in him, of entrusting our lives to him, of placing our lives in his hand at his disposal, of believing in him, as this woman did.

Your faith has saved you. Go in peace. Well, it wasn't our faith itself, strictly speaking, what is meant, of course, is that her faith as that locked on to Jesus brought her salvation.

And it's as certain as that for you and for me today as well. Your faith will save you, whosoever believes. That is the testimony of Scripture.

That is what Paul said to the Philippian jailer when he came trembling in before him after the earthquake had shattered his jail. What must I do to be saved?

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. God doesn't fall short of fulfilling his promise. That's his promise. That's his guarantee. And a lot of people, including myself, sometimes complicate things trying to work out what faith is, what the elements of faith are.

[30 : 44] That's all good. that's great. But Jesus keeps it very simple. Your faith, your trust in me has saved you.

Go in peace. Here's a woman who led a troubled life, who was notorious or well-known as a sinner, and yet she receives this amazing departing word from Christ.

Your faith has saved you. Go in peace. Literally, it's go into peace. If you want to stretch the language a bit, it's possible to say, what are you saying? Go into peace.

And that, of course, itself would be a precious emphasis. When Jesus forgives our sins, he doesn't leave us outside of the state of peace, of experiencing peace or knowing peace with God.

When you have your sin dealt with by Jesus, forgiven by Jesus, you have a peace with God. Your sin's not going to accuse you anymore.

[31 : 55] And Satan can't come to you and say, who are you to think of yourself as a Christian? Because you can say to him, I'm a sinner, but my sin is forgiven. And because my sin has been forgiven, and because the standing of Jesus himself in the presence of God has actually become my standing through my faith in him.

Who are you to accuse me? As Paul said in Romans 8, who is going to condemn the people of God?

Who is going to accuse the justified? It is Christ who died. Yes, is risen again. and is alive forevermore.

Go into peace. Do you know anything or something of that peace today? I know it comes to be troubled at times by returning sin, by the afflictions of this life, by the insinuations and attacks of Satan.

He disturbs our peace, but he can't take it from us. He can't remove it from our hearts. He can't take it off our record that we have been justified and forgiven by God.

[33 : 20] Enjoy that. Be assured of that. Live upon that. You see, God is not saying, or Jesus is not saying to the woman, your faith has saved you, go now into a life with the absence of troubles, a life that's no longer going to have difficulty or trial or troubles.

That's not what he's saying. He's not saying, go into a life consisting of the absence of troubles from now on. He's saying, go into peace, my peace.

But amongst your troubles, you'll have the presence of Christ, peace of Christ, the Christ who forgives. Who is this man?

Who is he to yourself? What's your response? How do you answer his question when he's now asking you to?

What do you think of me? What have you made of me? What's your relationship with me? Who is this man to you?

[34 : 35] Let's pray. Lord, our gracious God, your emphasis in your word is so abundant on your provision of forgiveness of sin.

Your pardon is great. Your forgiveness covers all of our transgressions, our iniquity, our trespasses. You deal with our sin as you find it, and with us as sinners as you find us.

And as you forgive our sin, we give thanks, O Lord, that you lift away our guilt, that you place us as righteous in standing in your own presence. O Lord God, today humble us, we pray, as this woman was humbled in coming into your presence.

Humble us at your feet, we pray, and enable us to come with tears of penitence and thanksgiving, and enable us to anoint you with our love. Hear us, we pray, for Jesus' sake.

Amen. Amen. Let's sing in conclusion now in Psalm 103, Psalm 103, page 369, that's again the Scottish Psalter version.

[35 : 47] sing verses 1 to 4, I think we'll sing verses 1 to 5 actually, because the end of verse 4 there is a colon, so we'll sing on to the end of verse 5, the 5 stanzas, O thou my soul, bless God the Lord, and all that in me is, be stirred up his holy name to magnify and bless.

Singing to the tune London New, Psalm 103, verses 1 to 5. O thou my soul, bless God the Lord, and all that in me is, be stirred up his holy name to magnify and blessed.

Bless, O my soul, the Lord, thy God, and not forgetful be.

Of all his gracious benefits, he hath bestowed on me.

All thine iniquities who doth most graciously forgive.

[37 : 30] For thy diseases all and pains do heal and he relieve.

Who doth redeem thy life as thou to death mayst not go down.

Who thee with loving kindness and tender mercy's crown.

Who with abundance of good things does satisfy thy mouth so that even as thee as it renew witness by you.

I'll go to the side door to my right this morning. I'll do the main door this evening. Now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore. Amen.

[39 : 04] Thank you.