

Enough to need forgiveness

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[0 : 0 0] We're going to be looking at Gospel Basics. It's the sort of summer period, and I always or I always have done, it doesn't need to be this way, but during the summer I've tried to take a break from our themes, whatever we've been doing. So we're going to take a break from Romans, we'll pick Romans back up when everything sort of picks back up again in the morning, and then in the evening we will go into a series, either a book or something like that. I have a few things that I believe that are appropriate for this coming sort of turn, but during the summer break, if you want to call it that, we're going to go back to Gospel Basics, and to do that we're going to begin in Luke 7. Now I am aware that if you've been to the Bible studies and you've been to Sunday morning and Sunday evenings over the years, then you've probably, I've probably taught on these or an aspect of these or if, or maybe all of them at some point, but I guess hopefully that the Gospel to you is like a, the equivalent of like a good song where you don't mind hearing it again and again and again. In other words, though you know it inside out perhaps, it is good to hear it again, it is good to be reminded. I hope that's not a qualification for preaching on something that I've preached on before or teaching on something that I've preached on before. I really wanted to bring to the church on Sunday evenings just, just a series for a few weeks on the basics of the Gospel, the things that don't change, that are there, and the things that we should remember and never forget. So Luke 7, chapter 36, sorry, Luke chapter 7, verse 36, and we'll read through to verse 50. Now hear God's Word. One of the Pharisees asked him, that's Jesus, asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment. And standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair on her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, 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. And Jesus answering said to him, Simon, I have something to say to you. And he answered, say it teacher. A certain money lender had two debtors. One owed 500 denarii, and the other 50. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more? Simon answered, the one I suppose for whom he cancelled 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. That's okay. You tell whoever it is I'm busy at this moment, and then we'll go back to it. I'll be fine.

If it's the president, I'll take it. But if it's not him, we'll leave it. He seems to ask anybody for advice, so I think, well, he might. You never know. You might. You know, he might just ask me. Anyway, back to the serious point. Verse 44. 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 has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from time, 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. Then those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, who is this, who even forgives sins? And he said to the woman, your faith has saved you. Go in peace. Well, I pray that God's, that the familiarity of the word wouldn't rob its message.

[5 : 18] You know how easy it is to turn off when something is familiar? You know, like when your mom's speaking to you, it's the voice that you've heard a thousand times before and therefore, and the same with my voice, perhaps. Well, I hope you will listen to God. We're going to stand and sing, and then we're going to come back to that word. To 50. I've given this message a title. It's not something that I would normally do, but I've given it the title of Enough to Need Forgiveness. Enough to Need Forgiveness.

The reason being is because of this, that forgiveness is the only reason why people belong to God. We need to think about that for a moment. The only reason why you belong to God is because God forgives.

Now, God can exist, and we can exist, but in order to belong, forgiveness needs to happen. So, forgiveness, without any more qualification than that, is the reason why we belong to God, and that is, I think, more important than you may initially think. There's another thing that needs to be mentioned here, and that's attitudes. You know, some people will reject other people on the basis of what they're like. You know, the reason why birds of a feather flock together, the reason why that statement is made to humans is because there's a certain underlying truth there, that we marry up with like people. You know, we jam with people who are like ourselves, and we sort of rub up against people who are different. Now, in one sphere, that's not too bad, but in the sphere of, let's say, social sins, or sins that are socially unacceptable, not just unacceptable before God, but socially unacceptable in the sense that, you know, in the eyes of the world, they get a hard time, then certain gaps can happen within societies and within groups. We don't want to be seen with those type of people. We don't want those people to hang around with us, and we certainly don't want to hang around with them. And Simon the Pharisee certainly expresses that kind of attitude towards this woman.

You know, he basically says that if Jesus knew what sort of woman she was, then he would be more like Simon. I mean, that's effectively what Simon is saying. If Jesus was more like me, then he would have nothing to do with this woman either. That's quite a powerful statement when you consider that we do divide ourselves from people, especially when the sin is known. She's a woman of the city. In other words, her sin's not private. Her sin is known by other people, and that makes sin all the more difficult to live with. It's one thing to have your own sin that you know about before God.

It's much more difficult to live with a sin that other people know about before God, socially unacceptable in the world. The issue here is, is that in Rome, you know, when you think of some of the words that Paul says to the Corinthian church, there are a lot of things that are accepted as norm.

[8 : 43] Homosexuality is normal. It's not a social wrong. Nothing wrong with it. Biblically, it's clearly wrong, but in that culture, there was no problem. You know, forgiveness is going to be more challenging today because forgiveness actually promotes change. And what I mean by that is this, that we're told that we need to be more accepting of people. And we're to be accepting of people to the point where there's no need for them to change. The issue here is that forgiveness does accept people whatever condition they're in, but forgiveness is the very agent of change, of not keeping you the way that you are. I want you to think about that for a moment. Forgiveness is basically saying to the world, yeah, you can't stay that way. It's not just saying, I will forgive you for the way that you are, but it is actually saying, you're not to stay that way. You know, this is seen in the woman who is forgiven much and she loves much. Her whole attitude changes towards Jesus. Jesus says things in other places where he says, yeah, I've forgiven you, go and sin no more. In other words, don't continue in the way that you have been continuing. Yeah, definite change happens when forgiveness is felt by a person's life. The other thing to recognize here is that God's forgiveness can reach the person who believes that they are the furthest away. You know, the biggest kind of social outcast.

And sometimes the biggest outcast may actually be in the most biggest kind of group, that they feel as though so far away from God and from everyone else, they decide to hide themselves in with a load of other people. You know, God can forgive the person who is the furthest sinner away from him in that sense. You know, God's forgiveness can reach anybody. I want you to think about that as well, that God's forgiveness can reach anybody. But God's forgiveness does mean change, because if it didn't, then there'd be no need for forgiveness. In other words, if God just accepted people as they were with no need for change, there'd be no need for forgiveness, because God is accepting you as you are with no need of change. You are the way you are. Now, forgiveness, when you look at it very, very carefully, it is promoting the need for change. When God forgives a person, he is forgiving a person to change, to not stay the way that they were, to not stay the way that they are. They are to be different moving forward.

And so, a person who experiences God's forgiveness is a person who, one, has been reached by God, and two, has been changed by God. Now, think about that. Reached and changed by God. So, to make that statement qualify again, forgiveness is the only reason why we belong to God. The only reason why we belong to God.

So, Jesus here, in the parable that he tells, and leading up to that, explains quite clearly that he does forgive, but forgiveness changes a person. The woman is forgiven, and she loves much because she has been forgiven much. And all of this begins with an invitation followed by an interruption. So, we're going to begin there with the invitation and the interruption. The invitation comes from Simon the Pharisee. We don't know that he's called Simon to begin with, but as you read down into verse 40, when Jesus said, Simon, I have something to say to you.

Simon the Pharisee. Okay. So, the Pharisee invites Jesus to his house, but not long after, it appears, as Jesus sat there around the table, enjoying fellowship with Simon and the others, which we learned that there are others around the table, verse 49. This woman comes into the house.

[13 : 04] Now, I don't know about you, but I've never barged into anybody's house. Hopefully, I've always knocked on the door. Even if they said, just walk in, I'd hopefully wait. And this woman finds out that Jesus is there. Now, it's not apparent immediately that she has any indication that we know that she knows Jesus, but it's clear by the parable that Jesus tells that she's already had an encounter with Jesus, that going into the house is going to find the person who has actually done something for her. So, she comes. Simon doesn't know this. Jesus does. And so, she entered this house and begins to do these actions towards Jesus. She's crying, and the tears wet his feet. She begins to dry his feet with her hair. She begins to anoint his feet with ointment. She does all of these actions. Simon, on the other hand, has been rudely interrupted. Here he has Jesus to himself wanting to find out who

Jesus is, and he has been rudely interrupted. But I think it's a profitable interruption, and here's why. I don't think Simon would have ever asked Jesus a lesson about forgiveness because of his attitude towards the woman. And I think it took the interruption of the woman around the table for Simon to learn the lesson that he did. I think he may have never have asked Jesus about the issue regarding forgiveness. But because of this interruption, the whole issue of forgiveness comes up.

Simon begins to learn something that he really needs to learn. So, in many ways, he really ought to be thankful for the interruption in the end, rather than perhaps dismissing it. Now, Simon seems to believe that Jesus wouldn't mix with such a person if he only knew what kind of person this woman was.

So, Simon already seems to think that he understands what Jesus is like. That if Jesus knew, then he wouldn't mix with this type of woman. But what Jesus does by the parable that he tells is that, no, these are the very people that I want to mix with. These are the very people that I want to be with. And the point to be made here is a fairly simple one, is that not only does Simon judge the character of the woman, but he misjudges the character of Jesus. In fact, he gets both people wrong, because his judgment of the woman is incorrect. He remembers her for her former self, rather than what Jesus has done for her and who she has become, a lover of God.

So, he makes two judgments and seems to get both wrong. He judges the woman and gets her wrong. He judges Jesus and gets him wrong. He seems to think that Jesus would have nothing to do with this type of woman. But this type of woman has had her sins forgiven by Jesus.

[16 : 29] And so, the question at the end, when you get to the end, is, you know, who is this who can even forgive sins? You know, Simon, we're not told that Simon says it, but we are told that he is one around the table when the question is asked. If you put Simon's statements together, or you put the two statements together, on the one hand, you have Simon saying, if this man were a prophet. In other words, if this man really knew, then he wouldn't be mixing with this type of woman. And then if you put the statement, who is this who even forgives sins, and you take these two statements together, the kind of conclusion that you come to is this, is that he seems to have made his mind up about Jesus, while at the same time having no idea who Jesus is. Now, how many people do that?

How many people make their mind up about Jesus, while at the same time having no idea who Jesus is? I think quite a lot. There are plenty of Simons in the world.

who not only judge other people, social classes, but judge Jesus and get Jesus very wrong. If God is like this, then he would be like that. And Simon judges Jesus and gets him completely wrong.

So we move on then to the action of the woman, and then the perception of Jesus. The action of the woman is that she begins to cry. Now, why would you cry at the feet of God? You know, Jesus hasn't said anything. She just comes into the house, she sees Jesus, and she begins to cry.

And she comes prepared. She has brought an alabaster of ointment. In other words, she's not just turned up, she's actually prepared herself to go ahead and look and find where Jesus is. It says, doesn't it, that when she found out that Jesus was there, you almost get the impression that she was really trying to find out where Jesus was. In other words, she's wanting to do something.

[18 : 31] She's wanting to find Jesus for a reason. And she's wanting to find him so that she can anoint his feet. But the trouble is, when she gets there, she cries. What causes a person to cry at the feet of Jesus?

You know, you see a little child crying. You say, why are you crying? You want to know what's caused the tears. You see an adult crying. You want to know what's causing the crying.

So here you'll have a woman coming in, crying at the feet of Jesus. What's the first question you're going to ask? Is it not, why are you crying? I don't know if that's the question that I would ask. Why are you crying? It's not until the parable of the debt and the cancellation do we get to understand why she's crying. Her sins have been forgiven. And it's been forgiven by this man who she's about to anoint the feet with ointment. She's crying because she has been forgiven.

Simon says, well, if this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman this was. And basically, he wouldn't allow this to happen to him. So Jesus, like Jesus does, says, Simon, I have something to say to you. Now, the moment Jesus says that, Simon ought to know that he was in a bit of trouble. Here's why. Because the moment Jesus says that, he proves that not only can he perceive what type of woman this is, but he also can perceive what type of man Simon is, hence why he says to Simon, I have something to say to you. Very telling. That Simon is accusing Jesus of not being perceptive, of not having enough wisdom to be able to see what people are like. And yet, when Jesus says to Simon, I have something to say to you, he proves that not only does he know very well who this woman is and what she is like, but also he knows the measure of Simon. He knows his character. He knows what he is like. He can perceive not only what type of woman this is, but he can perceive what type of man Simon is. And so he tells them this parable. And the parable's about debt.

Jesus seems to use the word debt, and financial debt in particular, to describe our sin before God and the fact that it can't be paid by us. You know, in financial terms, a debt exists before money.

[21 : 12] I'll give you an example. You have one man who owns a cow. You have another man who owns a field of carrots, but they're not quite ready yet. But the man who owns the field of carrots needs milk.

And so he goes to the man who owns the cow, and he says, can I have a pint of milk, or thereabouts, a bucket? And he says, sure, what will you give me for that? And he says, well, I'll give you some carrots, but they're not ready yet. They're not ready for picking. So they have this agreement that, okay, I'll give you the milk, but now you're in debt to me until you make a payment for that debt.

And so the debt is simply the agreement that, in a future time, I will pay it off with the carrots. In this situation, these people have obviously got themselves into a financial debt, which they can't pay back. They've borrowed something that may not have been money, but here it's, you know, 500 denarii. It's amounted to that, but they would have spent the money on something. You don't just have money for collecting. Some people might, but generally speaking, so they have this source of debt.

But Jesus' point is quite clear, that the amount of debt here does play a significant role, but the more important thing to recognize is that neither man can pay the debt. Neither person who has this debt can pay the debt. Think about that. It doesn't matter about the size of the debt at this point. Let's just think about the fact that you can't pay it. Now, earlier this year, somebody told me to go away and watch a film. The film was called I, Daniel Blake. Deeply moving, because it was about a single mother and her child who fell on hard times in the social order of this country.

And another man, he also fell on hard times. He got ill, couldn't keep his job through it because he was ill, and he too fell onto the so-called benefit system.

[23 : 11] The film is about a lot of things, but in particular, it focuses on these three people. The friend, the man, and the mother and the daughter who meet up at a benefit station, as it were. Now, this is a vulnerable woman with a vulnerable daughter who fall on hard times, and after a while, it took its toll. It's based on true stories. And this vulnerable mother fell into an even more vulnerable situation to the point where she became a prostitute. You know, there was nothing coming into the house. You know, money's important because it is the means of exchange to pay for electricity and food and everything else. And you need to understand why she was driven to that.

You know, what won't you do for your child? Forget about whether or not you agree with her action. Think about why she was led to that. What motivated her to that? Sure, none of us would agree with it, but there she is. Her friend would babysit the child, but then he found out what she was up to.

And he's distraught. And so he goes to find her, and he walks into the room, and there she is, laced up, you know, ready for... And she knows that he's not there to take advantage of her or to pay for that. And she breaks down, she runs out of the room, and then he catches up with her. And then you have this line. It's a line I find very hard to live with. Even now, I just, I've not been able to get it out of my head. And he says to her, I don't want you to do this. I'll support you as much as I can, or finance or whatever it may... He had nothing himself. And then she said this, don't show me any love. What would make a person say that? You know, I only think there's one thing that would make a person say that. And that is that when a person is in so much debt, or in a situation that is too big for them, they no longer are the person they were. And when you're no longer the person you are, you can accept that kind of love. I'll say more about that in a minute.

Jesus tells this parable of debt, of financial debt, of a person who had a very big debt, and another person had a debt who wasn't quite so big, but the important thing is neither could pay.

And the debt here is used to illustrate somebody's sin against God, and sin is something you cannot pay God back for. The debt is incurred. Perhaps the more you sin, the more debt you have incurred.

[26 : 02] But whatever it is, you can't pay it back. You can't make yourself right with God of your own doing. The debt has to be cancelled. Now, some people can believe that when they're in large debt, that they're beyond help. That some people can end up believing that when they're in deep, deep sin, that there is just too much in their life that needs forgiving.

You know, I've met quite a few people, older people, funnily enough, who really do believe that God can forgive, but other people, not them, because they have just too much that needs forgiving. That they believe that they're actually beyond the reach of God forgiving them, because the debt is just too big. That the debt is just too big to be cleared. Well, such people misunderstand Jesus. They haven't got Jesus right. But nevertheless, that's what they believe.

they have to be changed from that. I think other people, just like this young mother in the film, don't want to be loved in that way with debt cancellation or forgiveness, because the very love that they're receiving is the very spotlight on what they have become.

When you're in a position where you have to receive that kind of attention, that kind of attention is illustrated what you have become. And there's a lot of people who can't live with what they have become. What sin has made them. Even financial debt has made them. So I understand that girl's words on the film quite clearly. I think what was going through her head, or what was going through the author's head of the film is quite clear. And I think they're absolutely right. That some people, when they're in desperate situations, change. And they can accept help, because the very help highlights what they have become. And they don't want to face what they have become.

Yeah, don't show me any love. It's really sad. I mean, really sad. And forgiveness is the only thing, the only thing that can release a person from that, because forgiveness promotes change.

[28 : 35] Forgiveness, it says, you're not beyond reach, and you're not beyond change. Forgiveness of God reaches those people and changes those people. And that's what we need to hear.

That's the power of the gospel. This is why Jesus says, the dead of both men have been cancelled. But then Jesus cleverly asks the question, the all-important question, verse 42.

Now, which of them, Simon, will love him more? And Simon says, the one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt. Says Jesus. Got it right. Bang on. He understands. He understands. Jesus turns to the woman, but he speaks to Simon, explaining that the woman's actions in comparison to his own. Now, Jesus seems to be saying, verse 47 and 48, that, you know, she's doing this because she, verse 47, therefore I tell you, though her sins, which are many are forgiven, for she loved much. Verse 48 qualifies that by saying, and he said to her, sorry, it qualifies it further on, but he who is forgiven little loves little. The qualification is this, that the forgiveness comes first, the love for God comes second. The reason this woman is loving Jesus so much in the actions that she is doing towards Jesus is because she is the person with the greater debt compared to Simon. She's clearly the person with the greater debt compared to Simon. And the reason she is this way towards Jesus in comparison to Simon, who isn't, is because, one, she knows the size of her own debt, and two, she knows that God has forgiven her in Christ Jesus. She loves much because she has been forgiven much. He says, verse 48, your sins are forgiven. Verse 50, your faith has saved you. Go in peace. And that peace is important because that peace is not a feeling, it's knowledge. It's the peace that passes all understanding. Yet, it may lead to a feeling of peacefulness, but the peace spoken of here is a knowledge, and the knowledge is this, that you're right with God. The debt is cancelled. You're no longer a slave to the master. Isn't that what Proverbs says?

The borrower is a slave to the lender? And this woman is no longer indebted in that sense, no longer in debt to God, but has been forgiven by God. And the forgiveness releases this love for the Son of God who forgives her. Then the question arises, well, who is this who can even forgive sins? Now, they would have known that only God can forgive sins, and so they should have known who Jesus was, but of course, that's something very difficult to get your head around, it appears. But this woman seems to understand.

In other words, anybody can say your sins are forgiven. Anybody can say it. But this woman doesn't seem to respond in a way as if anyone has said, your sins are forgiven. You know, her actions don't seem to say that anyone just said to her, your sins are forgiven. No, she seems to know. Her actions seems to indicate that she knew who said to her, your sins are forgiven. That it is the one who really can forgive sins. To put it in a quip then, Jesus is not the debt collector, but Jesus is the debt counselor.

[32 : 27] Or to put it in the words of John 3, 17, Jesus did not come into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. He didn't come to collect the debt.

He came to cancel the debt. He didn't come to hold you to what you owed. He came to free you from what you owed. In conclusion then, the clear lesson here is one of forgiveness, but the underlying lesson is one of change. Forgiveness promoting change, a change, a love for God that not carrying on the way that we did. The other lesson here is that every sin needs forgiveness. Every sin needs forgiveness.

The amount of sin isn't the issue, but it is the issue when it comes to love for God, Jesus seems to be saying. Neither men could pay, and so both men needed their debts forgiven. The application, or really the question that you're faced with, this is never ever think that you have too much sin to be forgiven.

Never ever think that you have too much sin to be forgiven. But also, never ever think that you have too little sin to be forgiven. Everybody has enough to need forgiveness. Everybody has enough sin to need forgiveness. See, the lesson to this woman is you're not too far away to be reached and forgiven.

The lesson to Simon is that you have enough to be forgiven. Okay, he may not have the same amount as the woman, by comparison, but he too can't pay. Everybody has enough sin to be forgiven. Both lessons are important. Every sin requires the cross. Every amount of sin requires the cross. Here's a final thought then, as we sort of conclude. Simon seems to have a problem with Jesus, and the problem that he has with Jesus is that Jesus mixes with sinners. But then Simon seems to have a problem all of his own that he is unable to see, and that is, he doesn't see that he has enough sin to need forgiveness. That's his problem. But he does. That's why Jesus told the parable of two men owing, having a debt that neither could pay. Now, Simon seems to think that he is not like this woman. But the moment Jesus tells the parable, Jesus is saying, you're exactly like this woman. The size of the debt may be different, but the reality is you can't pay just like she couldn't pay. And yet God will forgive both. The size of the debt may be different, but forgiveness is the reason why people belong to God. A point that can be made from this parable, from a human point of view, even though we can all come at it from a different way, is that we all come to Jesus in the same way. We all come to Jesus through forgiveness. We all come to Jesus as people who can't pay their spiritual debt before God, their sinful debt before God. And so we come to

[35 : 51] Jesus knowing that we know who the one is who can forgive sin. We've met him. We have felt his forgiveness. The point is, we are all over there. The reality is that God forgives us our debt in Christ Jesus. So remember the lessons, too. You're not too far away to be reached, and you don't have too much sin that God cannot forgive. But it is equally true that you're not too close to think that you don't have enough sin that also needs forgiving. God forgives both, the debtor with great amount of debt and the debtor with a small debt, because neither can pay. Amen.