

Luke 7:36-50

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[0 : 00] Let's look at Luke's Gospel, chapter 7, verse 36. We'll start reading. One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined 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 wipe them with her hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed him with the ointment.

Now, when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, If this man was 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 moneylender had two debtors.

One owed 500 denarii and the other 50. When they could not pay, he canceled the debt of both. Now, which one of them will love him more?

[1 : 21] Simon answered, The one, I suppose, for whom he canceled the larger debt. And he said to him, You have judged rightly. Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, Do you see this woman?

I entered your house, and you gave me no water from my feet. But she has 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. He 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 saying among themselves, Who is this who even forgives sins?

[2 : 21] And he said to the woman, Your faith has saved you. Go in peace. So, again, a very familiar text.

I hope will speak to you in a fresh way. I tried to really avoid looking back at commentaries and previous messages just to avoid following a familiar outline and just really ask God to kind of say these are some things that he pointed out to me in this text.

So, we all know kind of what's going on. Jesus had just sort of started his earthly ministry and he's invited by one of the Pharisees to come and basically hang out and have a meal with them.

And I don't think it was really out of love or hospitality, more out of intrigue and want to take a closer look at this guy. Having meals with people like as today, but especially back then was a way of showing covenant with someone, friendship with someone, a very, you know, safe context to get to know somebody.

And, but I really just think they want to take a closer look at him. And I don't need to go on a long spiel about who Pharisees are. You definitely know that. But just the term Pharisee means separated ones.

[3 : 45] So just keep that in your head. It's like this idea of they are completely devoted in their mind at least to the law and the book of Moses and following all the laws and the rituals.

And so dinners back then as well, meals with very well-known people, dignitaries, famous people, they were kind of put on display and people at times would actually come and watch the dinner.

So you can imagine that like just they think that you're so awesome that people would come and watch you eat your food. So but that's kind of what it was. It was a social custom to be permitted even for the needy people to visit such a banquet to receive leftovers.

So there's a few points just that really felt would be good to convey from this text. But one, number one, is there is no sinner too great that forgiveness in Christ cannot be found.

There's no sinner too great that forgiveness in Christ cannot be found. And most of us would say, yeah, we know that. But I really want you to examine your own heart and think about people that you've interacted with that you may think this not true of.

[5 : 06] And we see this in verses 37-38. So first you have the identity of the woman that Luke doesn't fully disclose exactly who she is.

But it's very clear that she has a very stained reputation and more than likely was a prostitute. We don't know that, but it comes across that way.

And she could just be sleeping with men because she enjoys it and that's a way for her to make a living. That's definitely it.

So some women, though, however, can be forced into prostitution when they have no one to protect them or provide to them. That happens in other places in the world even today.

So we don't really know which one it was, whether she was forced into it or it was just kind of voluntarily. But what Simon actually says of her is like, if this man was a prophet, he would see what sort of woman this is.

[6 : 07] And that idea of what sort carries this idea of what kind of dirt she comes from, what kind of absolute filth she comes from. And the term sinner in this text denotes a heinous, habitual sinner known for being devoted to specific sins.

sins. So her presence there would have been a great insult to some degree for her to kind of not just be a spectator, but for her to actually come up to Jesus, who was the guest.

So it was a title given, a title particularly given to tax collectors, prostitutes, drunkards. And it says, I don't know, this was something that just sort of I thought about, but it said that she was a woman of the city.

And if you think about those of us who come from small towns, small communities, there's kind of an added burden of shame when you live in such close quarters with people and everyone knows who you are.

You can't just kind of disappear into a crowd. And it's like an extra guilt, extra shame that a lot of us don't really feel. And some people that I've met in the past have done such shameful things that they're even scared to go out in the public.

[7 : 23] And maybe even ashamed to kind of go show up in a church building or a church service. And that's very sad, but just a fear of man that drives them away.

And so no doubt she felt great guilt and great shame for the sin that she had committed. Sin is not just an action. It defiles us and makes us unclean.

If you think about some things that you've done, how it's brought immensely guilt, there's a verse in Ezekiel that I really saw a good while back.

It just really nails it. It's Ezekiel 20, verse 43. And it says, this is the Lord talking, and there you shall remember your ways and all your deeds with which you have defiled yourselves.

And you shall loathe yourselves for the evils that you have committed. sin has a way to defile us and cause us to loathe ourselves because of the things that we have done.

[8 : 31] And so she really has this on her shoulders. And so she comes before Jesus, she kind of crosses the boundary, so to speak, into the actual dinner that's taking place as he's reclining at the table.

And she takes this alabaster flask, which was a really soft stone used frequently to put perfume in particularly, probably one of the most valuable possessions she had.

And you see her gladly poured out on the feet of Jesus. And almost picturesque of her almost pouring out her spirit to Christ.

And with her tears, she washed Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair, which is amazing.

Because you know my footphobia, I can't stand feet, and this idea that she not only went that far, that's a great expression of love.

So if I ever do anything for your foot, it means I really love you. But she cried tears of just brokenness to Jesus on his feet and then wiped them with her hair.

[9 : 42] Both this idea of thankfulness, just in reverence, just for who Jesus is, and through herself in humility, just at his mercy. And we know this is just so symbolic of what Jesus has said about those who are broken and poor in spirit.

In Matthew 5, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they should be comforted. And recognizing our great spiritual bankruptcy before God, nothing to bring to him at all, how it's really an awareness of our need, our mourning, and our brokenness.

And this woman definitely has this on her mind. So, does the weight of your sin and shame hinder you from coming to Christ for mercy, even as a believer?

Do you tend to kind of stay at a distance sometimes before you've done enough acts of penance, where you make yourself feel worthy to come to Christ? But, there is no sinner to great.

There just isn't. This leads to number two, which we see in verse 39. Beware of having higher standards of righteousness than Jesus.

[11:01] Beware of having higher standards of righteousness than Jesus. and we see that Simon definitely has in his mind, as well, a lot of the other Pharisees at this time, that there are just good people and there are bad people.

And the truth is, there's not. There's only bad people and then Jesus. That's it. And we tend to gauge people by that sometimes. And they even look at Jesus and don't really see the righteousness in him at all.

And they think that they are far above this woman. This woman should not even be around. If anybody has a right to be around another righteous person, it's just one of them. And previously, just for sake of time, I may not read all this, but just in the previous verses leading up to this text in Luke 7, they're talking about John the Baptist.

And Jesus basically tells them, it doesn't matter who God sends, you're going to reject him if he's actually speaking the truth to you. Because John came and he had this very strict religious lifestyle. Very strict. He took the Nazarite vow. He did all these things that just set him apart. It's like very, I don't know, strict and religious.

[12:24] And more than them, probably. Then you have Jesus' ministry that was kind of characterized by more of a joyous ministry. So you have both someone who's very strict and very disciplined characterizing John's ministry, if you would, versus Jesus' ministry.

And they're rejecting both of them and just kind of saying, like, we don't believe. We think that, and Jesus calls them out for being childish in the previous verses. We've done all these things for you and you still don't listen.

And so, a small lesson inside of this is some people, no matter what you do, you can jump through all their hoops, answer all their questions, but the problem is at the end of the day, they just have a wicked, depraved heart, and the problem is their unbelief, not that they haven't been shown enough evidence of who God is.

And so, Jesus already has his reputation for looking, for hanging out with gluttons, tax collectors, and sinners. So they have this idea about Jesus, so they really think that they are above him in some ways.

So, beware of like sin becoming academic. That's a new word I've been appreciating lately. And academic means like you understand what it is on paper, and it works out this way, but reality is you don't have any clue at all.

[13:48] Like it's kind of like the difference between reading about something and experiencing something. So, beware that your sin is not academic. You would confess, like, yes, I know I'm a sinner, but like you don't really feel like the burden of that.

And do you, if not on paper, but in practice, see certain sins as worse than others? And do you believe that such people are beyond the mercy of God and his saving power in Christ?

And do you, even as a believer, focus on the sins of others to make yourself more comfortable? in your own self-righteousness. I do.

I did it earlier this week. And great conviction followed. But just beware that you're not gazing at Jesus or anyone else through the eyes of self-righteousness.

So, yeah, beware of that. Don't have a higher standard of righteousness because you don't. So, number three, point three. this is a big one.

[14:56] Our love for Christ or lack thereof is directly connected to the awareness of our own sin. Our love for Christ or lack thereof is directly connected to the awareness of our own sin.

And we see this in verses 40 through 47. So, Jesus knows what's going on. He knows he's discerning Simon's thoughts. And he tells him this parable to teach him a lesson about sin and

about God and about forgiveness and about who he is.

And 500 denarii, like both two money lenders, one owned 500 and the other one owned 50. 500 was the equivalent of about 20 months wages.

So, that's a long time. 50 denarii is about two months wages. So, a lot more, a lot less than 20 months wages. So, but it's meant to depict the reality that unconditional forgiveness was expressed by the money lender.

He forgave them unconditionally, but love was the result. And we have a tendency to kind of, as a culture, to disconnect sin from the love of God.

[16:14] And I had a professor in college that was a professor of religion and said that she was a Christian, but not really.

But she shunned me for talking about sin and I talked to her in her office a lot, just about this kind of stuff. And she just said, you should come to my church because in my church we talk about the love of God and how kind God is and how he's our father and all this stuff.

love of love of God and love of God. You have no idea how loving God is because your view of yourself is so big and your view of sin is so small.

And I actually read her this passage and she just goes, hmm, interesting. And I really, we have to understand that there's a connection. So this woman's love and faith was expressed by her works. She did three things that Simon did not. And if you see that in her text, like, she did this, you did not, Simon. So all these different things demonstrated her faith expressed in love and Simon's lack of it.

[17:29] Jesus not only approved of the woman kissing his feet, but reminded Simon that he had neglected to greet him with a kiss. And what was quite appropriate at that time, it was a welcoming thing.

And to not do some of these things or to wash Jesus' feet was an insult. So they didn't even show him the normal hospitality norms at all. So they really didn't respect him.

But he didn't make a big deal out of it. He just said, like, this woman has gone far beyond even what you, what I expected of you. So her love proved and authenticated her faith.

love much or love little. We need to be careful here, but there was Thomas Watson, one of my favorite Puritan guys, he said, until sin be bitter, Christ will not be sweet.

And we have to understand that there's a direct connection until we really understand who we are apart from Christ, the intensity of our sin, the depth of our need, the extent of our brokenness, and then the judgment that we deserve.

[18:41] We will never see Jesus or appreciate him for who he truly is. So, however, this doesn't mean that we merit forgiveness, rather that our love for Christ is the fruit of forgiveness.

And the parable itself depicts that forgiveness that's given unconditionally, and that love was the response to that. So, in verse 47, where you see this idea of her sins, which are many, are forgiven for she loved much.

That's, think of it as like wherefore, like the result of this, the evidence of this is her love towards me. So, not that she had earned his forgiveness and none of us ever could, that would go against the whole parable, plus what he just says in the next verse.

So, we know that we can't earn God's forgiveness. forgiveness. So, a while back, I read this devotional Future Grace by Piper on a sabbatical, and I'm rereading it with Adam Dome right now. Such a great reminder, but of course, all of us would say we can't earn forgiveness by good works, by doing good things for people, by attending services.

[19:59] I think we all know that, but how many of you have ever tried to pay God back with gratitude, or pay God back with love. And, man, this was a killer for me, because I feel like so much in my life, I've been saying, God has died for me, so therefore I just need to be grateful and just show him a lot of love.

But the problem with that is our love and our gratitude rises and falls every day. So, the power to live is, as followers of Jesus is not found in our gratitude and love ultimately.

Isn't that shocking? It is to me. But it can't be because it just rises and falls. At the end of the day, our gratitude and our love can be motivations, but it really seems to be that scripture puts the emphasis on grace.

Like, at the end of the day, it's still grace that's going to hold you, not your gratitude, not your love. And, kind of, so, tomorrow is, Kathleen's going to hit me if I'm wrong on this, I think it's my 12-year transplant anniversary, where I get my lungs at UAB.

So, it's really cool that Wes and Liz were on the day, because they were there, other than Nathan and Sam. But I know that I have this works-based mentality to pay God back for what he's done for me.

[21 : 27] And I want to pay him back by my gratitude and my love. And so, when I'm not grateful, and when I'm not loving God, I just hate myself. It's a really bad, bad cycle.

But we put emphasis on what was grace that taught my heart to fear, but we need to think about it's also grace that's going to lead us home. So, you can't pay God back with how grateful you are. I think that's what I unknowingly was trying to do. Like, God, I'm going to pay you back for the forgiveness you've shown me by being grateful. And you can't do it. It's just going to rise and fall. At the end of the day, it's still God's grace. It's still God's grace. God's grace towards us. None of us are ever truly aware of how sinful we are, like, ever.

We have moments where we're pretty clueless and we think we're pretty good people. And other times we're more aware of it. But none of us have ever been 100% aware of just how truly sinful we are.

[22 : 30] So even the most devout followers of Jesus failed at times to show that. But we know that, again, it's God's love and God's grace towards us. the breadth of it, the intensity of it, is what sustains us.

In 1 John 4, verse 9, it says, And this is the love of God, was made manifest among us that God sent his only son into the world so that we might live through him.

And this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the repitiation for our sins. It's very great.

So, number four, forgiveness can only be found by faith in Christ. Forgiveness can only be found by faith in Christ.

And see this in verses 48 through 50. Jesus has the authority to forgive sins, which only technically God can do.

[23 : 30] Faith, her faith saves her, not her works. So she abandons all any pretense of her own self righteousness and just clings to Christ's righteousness. And all that is expressed in her actions.

Think about the faith that it took her to even show her face there. Like, she must have just heard that Jesus was around. Must have just heard that he was in the neighborhood.

And then the stuff that she had heard about him just said, this man must be a man of mercy. This man might be my only hope. And so she, regardless of what people think about her, she shows up there.

So think about the fear of man that her faith overcame in that moment. And because she believed that Jesus was worth it. And her faith was expressed in the love that she showed towards him.

And so, but, you know, Christ told her, hey, your faith has saved you. Go in peace. Those are amazing words. Like, we all long to kind of hear that.

[24 : 36] And understand, though, that Jesus knew in the back of his mind that I'm going to pay the penalty for that woman's sins. There's no such thing as pardon without payment of debt in God's eyes.

Christ had to pay the penalty for our sin, and he did, as well as for this woman's sin. Really quickly, flip over to Colossians chapter 2. Colossians chapter 2.

Colossians chapter 2, and look at verse 13. And Paul writes, And you, who were dead in your trespasses, and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.

This, he set aside, mailing it to the cross. So this idea of a record of debt, all the stuff that you have done and thought that was dishonoring to God, Christ paid the price for it, and canceled it by his sacrifice on the cross.

God in our story, Jesus knows that he's going to have to do that. He can't just forgive this woman and just go on. But our salvation, our faith, our forgiveness of sins is only found by Christ dying for us.

[26 : 08] So, lastly, verse, this is more of an implication, but because, this is number five, because God has forgiven us in Christ, so we must forgive others.

So, the joy and freedom of forgiveness that we've experienced in Christ, we must express to others from the heart. For in that kind of forgiveness, people see a picture of Jesus.

It points to him. And it's not out of duty, but out of what God has wrought in our hearts through him showing us forgiveness. Also, in Colossians, if you just jump down the next chapter, it says, put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing one another, and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And so, those of us who have been set free and forgiven by Christ, we should be eager to show that to other people, for in that they see the forgiveness of Christ. And just, if there's anything that needs to be dealt with in your heart today, things that you need to ask the Lord for forgiveness for, or go to someone that you have sinned against, and say, hey, I need to ask your forgiveness, may this kind of be a driving force of that, but I pray that you would just kind of see the grace and forgiveness of Christ with no strings attached. [27 : 55] You can't pay them back, it's just free, and there's nothing we've done that cannot be pardoned and forgiven. God is not just forgiving us because he just feels bad for us, it's because he truly is kind towards us, he wants to show us that kind of forgiveness, and I pray that that just transforms our hearts today.