

Luke 7:36-50 **Who is This Man, Jesus?** February 12, 2017

A Spanish story tells of an estranged father and son. The son ran away from home. His father set out to find him. He searched for months without success. Finally, in a last desperate effort, he put an advertisement in the newspaper. It read, 'Dear Paco, meet me in front of this newspaper office at noon on Saturday. All is forgiven. I love you, Your Father.' On Saturday 800 Pacos showed up, looking for forgiveness and love from their fathers.

We all need forgiveness and love – particularly from our fathers. One psychiatrist noted that if he could convince his patients in psychiatric hospitals that their sins were forgiven, 75% of them could go home. Yet far greater is our need for forgiveness and love from our heavenly Father. And that's our focus this morning.

Our Lord's parable of the two debtors in verses 41, 42 is the centrepiece of Luke 7:36-50. ***“Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he cancelled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?”*** This parable teaches a simple truth: Our degree of thankfulness is directly proportional to the amount of our cancelled debt.

Then Jesus asked Simon which debtor would love the moneylender more. The answer was obvious: The one who'd had the bigger debt cancelled. We can easily see the meaning of the parable: The greater the forgiven debt, the greater the thankfulness. Yet Simon couldn't see the application of this in his own home.

Simon had invited Jesus for dinner. The Pharisees followed strict religious practices. They zealously fasted, prayed and tithed their goods. They also sought to convert others to their ways. On occasion they ruthlessly opposed their enemies. They certainly persecuted the Lord Jesus. Yet this deeply religious Pharisee, Simon, neglected to show common courtesy to Jesus in his home.

When I'm invited into someone's home, I'm received with some form of greeting. Before going inside I might take off my shoes. Then, I'll probably be offered a handshake; be asked to take a seat, usually followed by, “Would you like a cup of tea?” These courtesies make us feel welcome in another person's home.

Simon had invited the Lord Jesus to dinner. Jesus went in and reclined at the table. Leaning on His left arm, His bare feet would have extended away from the table. But Simon, the Pharisee, did not greet Jesus with a kiss. Nor did he wash His feet or pour scented oil on His head. Yet those were the customs of his time.

During the meal a woman entered. She was one who'd lived a questionable moral life. The woman no doubt knew Jesus. Maybe she'd merely intended to give Jesus a present of the ***alabaster jar of perfume***. Nevertheless, she'd heard Him preach the Gospel and the burden of her sin had been washed away. Perhaps she'd heard the Lord Jesus say, ***“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*** (Matthew 11:28-30) Whatever she has heard, this woman knows that her sins are forgiven. She has already come to Christ in repentance and faith.

What happened next was most embarrassing for Simon. The woman couldn't control her emotions. In the presence of her Saviour, her tears began to fall. Listen to 7:38, ***As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.*** Can you picture the scene? There is Simon, the self-righteous Pharisee, ashamed at what was happening. What was this woman of questionable reputation doing in his house? Her presence troubled him deeply. His house was now unclean. And, to make things worse, she was weeping at Jesus' feet.

Simon began to see Jesus differently. Maybe, at first, he thought to have a good debate with this teacher. But now he begins to doubt Jesus. 7:39, ***“If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is – that she is a sinner.”*** Surely this woman has made Jesus unclean. But if he'd been with the Lord at another dinner, he'd have heard Jesus say (Matthew 9:13), ***“I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”***

Jesus knew not only the heart of the woman, He could also see into Simon's heart. And so the Lord told Simon the parable of the moneylender and the two debtors.

Both of the debtors lacked the funds to repay their debt. The remarkable thing is that the creditor cancelled the debts of both men. 7:42b, ***“Now which of them will love him more?”*** Jesus asked Simon. 7:43, Simon grudgingly replied, ***“I suppose the one who had the bigger debt cancelled”***. Only then did he realize that the parable involved him. 7:44, ***Then he [Jesus] turned toward the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman?”*** Of course Simon did! He’d been acutely embarrassed at what had happened. But the Lord Jesus wanted him to see her from a spiritual point of view. While Simon continued to see her as a sinner he failed to see two things. First, that she was a forgiven sinner. Second, that Simon was also a sinner in need of the Saviour.

The Lord Jesus was gentle with Simon. He didn’t scold him, but pointed out the differences between him and the woman. 7:44-46, ***“You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.”*** Then the Lord Jesus applies what she had done to the new life that she has found in Him. 7:47-48, ***“Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.”*** Then Jesus said to her, ***“Your sins are forgiven.”*** The fundamental difference between them is this: Only one of them believed that God demonstrates grace toward sinners. The Pharisee had no room for God’s grace in his life.

The Lord Jesus saw the woman as a forgiven sinner. Her sins were many. Now, because they’ve been forgiven, she loved much. The love that she showed proved that that her sins had already been forgiven. There was nothing that she could do to earn forgiveness. It wasn’t the expensive gift of perfume that saved her. Nor was it the fact that she did for her Lord what Simon ought to have done.

Jesus’ parable taught that the two debtors’ debts were cancelled without any work on their part. It’s the same with regard to sin. The Lord Jesus had forgiven the woman. He’d relieved the burden of her sin. Anointing Jesus is her faith at work. And now, nothing is too much for her Lord and Saviour.

The Lord asked Simon if he saw the woman. Did he really see her? By means of the parable and the contrast in the lives of Simon and the woman, Jesus implies that Simon should take a good look at his life. It was in faith that the woman came and anointed the Lord Jesus. Her love is the consequence, not the cause of her salvation. And so that Lord Jesus said to her, ***go in peace.***

There are five key lessons to learn from this parable and the surrounding story. 1. We cannot earn forgiveness for our sin. Our part is to come to Christ in repentance and faith. 2. God forgives all who repent, no matter how great the sin. 3. The greater the depth of our cancelled sin, the greater will be our love for the Lord. Yet, like this woman, we’ve all been forgiven much. 4. Forgiven sinners freely enter into God’s presence. 5. Through faith in Christ we have peace with God.

Even so, something here directly touches our lives. Compare the Pharisee with the woman. He’s self-righteous, unaware of his need for the Saviour. How many of us are like him? We do good things in our family and society. We’re kind and generous. It would look good to invite Jesus home for lunch for a chat. And Simon did.

But we don’t need Jesus to improve our reputation in the community. We need Him as our Lord and Saviour. We need Him to forgive us our sins. Because she’d been forgiven much, her response, her love for the Lord, really shines through these verses. Genuine love for Him comes only when in Jesus we experience forgiveness of sin and assurance of pardon.

The woman models for us how we should approach the Lord. In this Bible passage she holds up a mirror to our lives. Luke does not list her sins. We only know that she had lived a sinful life (7:37). The Lord Jesus doesn’t condemn her previous lifestyle. Instead, He accepts her act of love. We can safely assume that she would sin no more. Her tears flowed freely at the thought of the freedom that she has found. Her tears were not from shame, but love. Because she had come to know Jesus as her Lord and Saviour, her gratitude knows no bounds. The perfume would have been expensive. But the Lord Jesus was worth every cent she spent to buy it. 7:47, ***“Her sins have been forgiven—for she loved much.”***

Can I ask you, ‘Do you feel like this about Jesus? Or, are you like the Pharisee?’ Much of the world is like him. Many people know about God and His Son, Jesus. They know that He died on the cross for the sins of the world. But it was not for their sins. Are you like that? “Oh!” you say. “I’m not really that bad a sinner. I’m a good, upstanding member of the community. I pay my taxes and my bills on time, I give to charity, not much, but each little bit helps. I give to the church, but not too much, because they might waste it.”

Does it offend you when I speak like that? It would have offended Simon. His opinion of Jesus went down when Jesus didn't rebuke the woman. But the woman knew what the Lord had done for her. The debt of her sin, no matter how big or small had been cancelled. Out of love she did what Simon should have done, and more. She washed His feet. She greeted Him with a kiss and anointed His feet with costly perfume. Why? Because she loved Him. And now, nothing was too much for her Lord.

Are you like that? When you hear how someone came to saving faith in the Lord, do you weep with them? This woman would. Do you give generously to the Lord? She did. Would you even be prepared to humiliate yourself in front of important people to declare your love for the Lord? She did. Love was her motivation, because she knew the depth of her sin and the depth of Christ's forgiveness.

But did she know that Jesus would take her place on the cross? Did she know that He would die an ugly death for her? At this time she would not.

But you and I know! The Bible tells us that Christ suffered and died, but also that He rose from the dead. His victory over sin and death is complete. Sin can have no power over your life through faith in Him. Somehow, she knew that. But then she came face to face with the Lord and she faced her sin. Have you and I done that?

Probably the most powerful forces at work in the universe are forgiveness and love. Simon, the Pharisee, was self-righteous. The unnamed woman was clearly a sinner. But more than that, she was now a forgiven sinner. She found new life and new love in Christ. And just as she did, so too can you and I. The beauty of the gospel is that faith in Christ brings forgiveness of your sins, and mine too.

We might think that our sin is not as significant as the woman in Luke 7. But then we're only fooling ourselves. All sin separates us from God. We read in Romans 3:22b, 23, ***There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...*** That is the bad news. Paul would say much the same thing in Romans 6:23a, ***For the wages of sin is death.*** Sin truly separates us from God. But there is hope for us. (Romans 6:23) ***For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*** Here is good news for the woman in Luke 7 and for us. United to Christ by faith we have forgiveness of our sin, peace with God and eternal life.

Luke 7:49, ***The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"*** These guests ask the most important question one could ever ask. Who is Jesus? It's a question that you and I must answer. Our future depends upon it.

Only God can forgive sins. The Pharisees knew that to be true (Luke 5:21). And the Lord Jesus forgave her sins. Luke 7:48, ***Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."*** Luke 7:50, ***Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."***

This account of the Pharisee, the woman and the Lord Jesus is one of the most beautiful in the New Testament. The Lord Jesus had changed her life. Her love for Him was now plain for all to see as she wept before Him. But what happened to Simon the Pharisee? Did he turn to the Lord Jesus in repentance and faith? The Bible is silent about Simon's future. But Simon is long gone from this earth. He is long dead. We must answer the guest's question, ***"Who is this who even forgives sins?"*** Our answer sets the path for our future.

I sometimes chat with a friend while we're walking our dogs. He likes to debate religion. And he wonders why Christians believe in original sin. But, he's asking the wrong question. The real question is, 'How can he deal with his sin?' Truly, he cannot. The Lord Jesus paid the price for our sin on the cross. The shadow of the cross falls on all of history, past present and future.

The Lord Jesus asked Simon if he saw the woman. Did he see her as a forgiven sinner? The question for us is this: Have you seen Jesus? Do you really see Him as He is? Do you see Him as your Saviour and Lord? For, this woman is you. She is me. Amen