

Rev Joe Barnard: Luke 7:36-50

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 00] If you have a Bible, please open it up. It's a Luke chapter 7. Again, we'll be thinking of the story of a sinful woman forgiven in verse 36 to the end of the chapter.

Now, I live, I work in kiltarality. In kiltarality, there's a castle just outside the village where Lord Loveit and his family lived for centuries. It's now owned by Aang Glow, who owns the bus company that runs the buses through most of Scotland.

And in her family, they often come up for holidays to this castle. Now, I want you to imagine what would happen if one day I decided that I wanted to go in to eat with them.

So I left the mansion in kiltarality, I drove through the gate, I went up to the front door of this castle, I knocked on the front door. Somebody opens the front door, I walk through, I walk through the corridor up the stairs, I go around to the dining room.

There is all of the family seated around for dinner. I pull out a chair, I sit down and I smile and I just ask somebody, could you pass the potatoes?

[1 : 11] What would they be thinking? Now, they would be thinking, who are you to be seated at this table? Where'd you come from? What gave you a right to come through that door to come sit among us?

Now, some of us probably have a similar set of questions when we think about the Lord's table. Because when it comes to the Lord's table, we're not talking about somebody who's wealthy and successful, in the world's eyes, we're talking about the Creator God.

And often we ask that question, how on earth could we ever sit at a table spread by God, belonging to God?

And that's the question I want us to focus on as we think about this story which is about just that, dining with Jesus. Now, perhaps you know this story, but I want us just to think from the beginning. You know, if you look at verse 36, you have, this whole story begins when a Pharisee by the name of Simon invites Jesus to eat with him. You might ask the question, what were the motives of Simon?

[2 : 18] Now, often the Pharisees are out to trap Jesus. But there's no indication of that in this particular story. In this time, it was typical for middle class people, for educated people.

You know, if there was someone teaching interesting ideas, people liked dinner parties. If you had a young rabbi like Jesus who was teaching provocative, interesting new things, it would not be uncommon for someone like Simon to invite him into his home because he'd want to know more about what Jesus was saying and doing.

And so we have no reason to think that Simon had any motives other than he wanted to learn more about Jesus and that's why he invited him into his home. Now, as we think of this meal, I think it's helpful to step outside of our cultural environment and to try to reimagine what it would have looked like in that house of Simon.

And so let's try to imagine what the houses look like back then. They're not like the houses that we had today. Most houses only had one main room. If he was wealthy, maybe he had a couple of other rooms.

But there would have been one main room for entertaining. It wouldn't have been high ceilings. A ceiling would have maybe been seven feet tall. There wouldn't have been big windows that allowed a lot of light into the room.

[3 : 38] So it would have been dark on the inside. It might have been a little bit like the old black houses here with a lamp or two shining. Now, as people sat to eat, they weren't seated at tables.

They reclined. There was a kind of a U-shaped form. And they reclined on their left side so they could reach in with their right arm and they could grab food from the dishes.

And everyone was facing on the inside close enough that you could hear what was being said. Now, there would have been a lot of commotion at this kind of meal. You would have had conversation. You would have had people sharing ideas. You would have had laughter. You'd have servants coming in and out changing the dishes of the food. You would have also had, this is so different from our context, but these houses were on the main streets of the village. And there's stories that often as people would walk by, they'd look inside the doorway to see who was dining with whom.

[4 : 39] Sometimes they would even enter into the conversation. And so there would have been all kinds of noise as Simon and Jesus and the others gathered. We're talking about the Kingdom of God and everything that Jesus had been teaching.

Now, at some point, we don't know when a woman slips into the dining room of Simon. Now, again, imagine it's dark.

Imagine she's able to get in that people don't initially recognize who she is. There's only two things that we really know about this woman. One, we know that she was a sinner.

And often that word sinner in verse 37, it referred to apostasy. And we know that she seemingly was fairly good at her job because she owned an alabaster flask of expensive ointment.

So somehow she was able to purchase this through her work. Now, this woman she comes in, we can assume that nobody saw her at the door because she wouldn't have gotten in.

[5 : 46] Somehow she's able to go to where Jesus is seated. Then all of a sudden, she begins to weep. Now, the word weep is interesting because a more literal translation is, it's not just that she was teary-eyed.

A literal translation of this word would be that she violently sobbed. So you imagine the disruption, the sign in and these men, they're all seated around this table, that all of a sudden, first they hear violent sobs and they look over and there is this woman who's known within the whole town as a sinner.

At the feet of Jesus, she breaks the flask. Now, have you ever been in a car when somebody has sprayed perfume? What happens? It fills the space.

You imagine someone taking a bottle of perfume, breaking the bottle and pouring it out on the feet of Jesus. That would flood the space of the room.

There's nothing that this woman could do that would be more disruptive than to sob at the feet of Jesus to break a bottle of perfume. And for all of a sudden, that's just to break the conversation that everyone is having.

[7 : 06] Now, it's interesting to think of the implications of what this woman was doing. You've got to realize that first she was breaking religious protocol.

In this society, at that time, the view of sin was that sin wasn't just a private concern. If you committed a sin, it wasn't just that your own heart was defiled.

In a real sense, the guilt, the dirt of that sin was contagious. And so here's a woman touching, kissing, weeping the feet of a rabbi.

You can only think how scandalized Simon would be to think, why isn't Jesus standing up in an anger, forcing the woman to leave the building?

That would have been normal. That would have been acceptable. You know, it wasn't just the religious protocol that was being broken. It was the social protocol. Women didn't die with men in this society.

[8 : 14] She shouldn't have been in the room. Maybe there was a servant girl bringing food in, but there was no woman at this table of this Pharisee. And so it's not just the religious standards that are being violated.

She's breaking the social standards. Now, what's interesting is Simon, we're told, he has this thought. He says this to himself in verse 39, if this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him.

And sometimes we wonder how Luke knows that Simon was thinking this. And of course, we all know that Jesus, that he did know the thoughts of Simon. Because Jesus knows the thoughts of everyone.

However, I don't think he probably would have needed to know the inner thoughts of Simon to know what he was thinking. Because I think it was probably written very obviously across his face.

As he was staring over during this meal, watching Jesus, thinking, what are you doing?

[9 : 21] Why aren't you angry? Where is your zeal for holiness? Who do you think you are to allow this to happen in my house?

It's not just your reputation. It's my reputation that's tarnished as this story circulates around the village.

Now, isn't Jesus remarkable? Because Jesus, he's always in control of every situation. So what does Jesus do as he sees these thoughts in the heart and in the face of Simon?

Well, verse 40, he says, Simon, I have something to say to you. The wonderful thing about Jesus is he always forces the other person to acknowledge and to actually state the truth for themselves. And so Jesus uses his favorite teaching technique. He tells a story. Now, maybe you know this story well. The story, it's relatively short and simple. Look at verse 41, there's a money lender.

[10 : 23] There are two debtors. One debtor owed 500 denarii, the other 50. Now, remember, a denarii was basically the amount that somebody earned for a day's work.

Don't think that that means that these men could pay off their debt over 50 days, over 500 days. That's not the case. People in that day earned subsistent wages.

In other words, they earned enough for a day's work to buy bread for them and their family. So if you owed 50 denarii or 500 denarii, you're not looking at something that you can pay off over months.

You don't have any extra income. And so we're told that neither of these men are able to repay their debt. And so what does the money lender do? He does something that's utterly shocking.

He cancels the debt of both. And then Jesus, he asks the question, who do you think loved him more?

[11 : 25] Now, it's interesting. Have you ever been at a party or at somebody's house? And often for that conversation starter, people like to ask this question, if you could ask anybody to dinner over all of human history, who do you have over?

There's usually somebody who's a really good Christian, right? Who says, you know, I'd love to have Jesus over. But there's one sense that I agree that I would love to sit at a table and dine with Jesus.

Because honestly, I think that he'd be funny. He'd be interesting. You know, he'd be insightful and you'd walk away having thought thoughts that you'd never imagined before.

But to be honest, I'd be scared to death to sit at a table with Jesus. Because he has this ability like no other to reveal the heart. He's scared to death that he would do to me what he did to Simon, which is to ask me a question.

Because if it's Jesus, you know it's a loaded question. You know it's meant to cut and to reveal. And Simon, he knows that. What is Jesus again? What does he ask?

[12 : 30] Which of them loved the moneylender more? At this point, I imagine that Simon, you know, he's thinking about what Jesus is getting to. And he says the right answer. He says the one I suppose for whom you canceled the larger debt.

And Jesus tells him that you have judged rightly. Now it's interesting, it's only at this point that Jesus turns to the woman and speaks to her. Up until now, he said nothing.

We've got to step back and think a little bit more about this woman. I mean, imagine that you are this sinful woman. That you find out that Jesus is coming to your village.

Now Jesus wasn't at every village all the time. This was her chance to go to Jesus. But you imagine that you're a sinful woman.

And that you find out that where Jesus is is in the house of a Pharisee. I mean, I imagine this woman, you know, she probably left. She probably was going back and forth in her mind.

[13 : 33] I'm going to go see Jesus. No, I'm not. You know, she probably got to the doorway of Simon's house and she was looking in and thinking, I've got to go in. I've got to see Jesus. But then she was thinking, no, I can't go in there.

What will they do to me in there? Or be humiliated in there? And finally she gets the courage and she goes in. And you can imagine her head would be down.

She'd be full of shame. She wouldn't want to look into the eyes of Simon or any of the other men. She goes straight to the feet of Jesus and she breaks down there. And there she has been. She's been sobbing.

She's been pouring the perfume. She's been waiting to hear what will Jesus say to me. And it's at this point that Jesus, he turns.

And first he speaks to Simon. He says, Simon, you know what? And remember in this day there were certain protocols that his important guests came in. You washed their feet. You gave them a kiss. If they were particularly special, you anointed their head with oil.

[14 : 38] You maybe even put a wreath or a garland on their head. Jesus, he turns to Simon. He says, you know what? I came in. You didn't give me a kiss. You didn't wash my feet.

You didn't anoint my head with oil. But this woman she has stopped kissing my feet, says, I've been here. You know, she's been wiping them with her hair.

This woman, you know, she has been recognizing who I am. She's poured her ointment, her fragrance over my feet. And this is the moment when Jesus speaks for the first time to the woman. And you know what she says? Verse 48, your sins are forgiven.

Can you imagine the release of this woman? You know, for whom this, this bottle of perfume, this represented her lifestyle.

[15 : 41] And then she poured it out upon the feet of Jesus. Waiting to hear what will he say, knowing that she's being scorned in the eyes of everyone around her.

To hear Jesus say, your sins are forgiven. Can you imagine the difference between how she felt going in and how she felt leaving?

Burdened by guilt and shame, released with freedom, released with the joy of salvation as she left this home.

Now, it's interesting the way this story ends. Because for some that leave this table, they leave memory. Verse 49, the thought that they're left with is, who is this?

Who even forgives sins? And then on the other hand, you're left with the woman who's told your faith has saved you. Go in peace, a blessing upon her.

[16 : 48] Now, I'll tell you what's so interesting to me about these stories. It's the way these different characters provide us different windows to look at the action of the story.

Isn't it interesting to think about what happened that evening through the eyes of Simon the Pharisee? What did he see through these actions?

You know what I think he saw? First, he saw rudeness. First, he saw who is this woman to think that she can do this?

Who is this man to think that he can allow this? And then in the time in that night, he saw rudeness, he saw sacrilege, he saw discourtesy.

He was angry, he was frustrated. He was probably embarrassed. You know, then you can ask the question, what did the woman see that night?

[17 : 47] She saw something altogether different. First of all, she saw an opportunity to be reconciled to God. And she saw grace.

And she saw her only chance to be free to her sin. And so nothing was going to keep that woman from the feet of Jesus. Because she saw that was her moment to be washed clean of everything that was vile and shameful of her past.

And then you can ask the question, what did Jesus see on that day? You know, on the one hand, he saw Simon. In Simon, he is an emblem of pride. He is the emblem of a religious person who just doesn't get it.

Who honestly is frustrated and scandalized by the grace of God and refuses to accept just how merciful the Creator God really is.

But then at the same time, Jesus, he saw this woman. And friends, what I want you to know is this woman, she is the universal model of faith for all of us today.

[19 : 01] Do you want to know what faith is? You look at this woman. The first thing we see about this woman is we see her humility. You know where she went?

She didn't go to the head of Jesus. She didn't go give him a kiss on the cheek. She went to his feet. That's where she went. That's where she wept. She washed his feet with her tears.

And friends, all of us, if we're going to come to Jesus, we've got to recognize who he is. That honestly, the only place that we can go, we can go to his feet. He's the King of King. He's the Lord of Lords.

He has to speak his mercy and lift us, lift our eyes. That left to ourselves, we have nothing that deserves to be with him.

And yet that humility didn't keep her from going to Jesus. She was humble. Secondly, what we see is that she was full of remorse, godly remorse for her sin.

[20 : 01] Again, I told you that she sobbed violently at the feet of Jesus. And friends, as we go to Jesus, all of us should be in that place where we recognize what we have done to him.

We see something of Jesus that this woman had not yet seen. And that was that her sin was going to drive him to a cross, to be judged in her place, to be crucified among sinners.

And friends, what faith is, it is that approaching Christ in humility, it's approaching him with that honest reckoning of sin that can't but leave us with remorse. But friends, it's also that courage of faith to go to Jesus.

Because ultimately that woman, she could have been afraid. She could have allowed other people's views of her to keep her from being willing to go to Jesus, but nothing would keep her from going to him.

And friends, that's what faith is. It's recognizing just how humble we have to be when we recognize who we are. It's recognizing, yes, that the guilt of our sin is real and true, but nonetheless it's having the courage to take that guilt to the only place where it can be forgiven which is at the feet of Jesus.

[21 : 30] Let me ask you this question. Who was the only person that should have been dying with Jesus? That evening. Not Simon the Pharisee, who loved little, because he thought he'd sin little.

You know the remarkable truth of this story is that the only person that really should have been dealing with Jesus was the sinful woman who had wept at his feet and heard him speak his pardon of her sin directly to her.

And friends, that's the same reality that we're going to celebrate this morning. Who belongs at this table? It's not the religious. It's not those that honestly feel like they've been forgiven little because they've sinned little.

But like that table on the go, this table is spread for sinners that know that they have no place to go other than to defeat of Jesus for forgiveness.

And so that's the marvel we see in this story is a picture of the kingdom of God that one day when God sets that banquet table, who will be seated around it?

[22 : 50] It's going to be a host of people like this woman who'd made big messes in their lives, but had gone to Jesus and discovered God's willingness through Christ to forgive sinners.

To give them righteousness and to give them a place at his table. Not just for a moment, but for eternity.

That's the glory revealed through this story. Let's calm, let's pray, let's ask God to give us understanding of his grace, of his fellowship.