

Osaka International Church
Sunday 24/7/16
Luke 7:36-50 "Living Debt Free"
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³⁶ When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. ³⁷ A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. 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. ³⁹ When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "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."⁴⁰ Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said. ⁴¹ "Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii,^[c] and the other fifty. ⁴² Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"⁴³ Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said. ⁴⁴ Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵ You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. ⁴⁷ Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little."⁴⁸ Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."⁴⁹ The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"⁵⁰ Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

How well do you know yourself? Do you have any blind spots? What are you really like, what motivates you or makes you tick? In almost every culture or philosophy from Buddhism to Islam to atheism there's a lot of importance placed on knowing yourself as the path to true freedom or wisdom. It's important for the Christian life as well, but not like you might think, because the conclusion you come to about yourself will affect how you view Jesus, and the chances are you may have come to the wrong conclusion about both. That's what we find here in this passage: a man who thinks he has the world (and Jesus) all sorted out, but completely misses the point, and a woman whose world is falling apart but who knows she desperately needs help.

*So what we're going to do now is take a look at the situation Luke recalls for us at Simon's house, and we're going to see through this account that: firstly we've got to **realise we're great sinners**, and secondly that **Jesus is a great saviour**.*

I. Realise you are a great sinner

*But we can't really get to grips with the full force of what Luke is retelling here unless we tackle one of the major ideas of his story: **sin**. It's all over this passage either directly or indirectly, we can't escape it. The woman who makes such a scene here is described by Luke as a 'woman [...] who had lived a sinful life.' That's all we're told about her. So we're going to look firstly at **how we misunderstand sin**, and **how Jesus re-orientes us to a right view of ourselves as sinners**. Because unless we understand this thing called 'sin' we'll miss the point of this passage.*

a. What is sin?

i. What is sin? How would you define it? Many would say it's 'doing bad things', stealing or murder or adultery like a crime you commit. And that's partly true, but not the whole picture.

1. What if I asked you instead 'where does sin come from, what do you think?' That's a different question, isn't it? You see, in the Bible sin is not just the

bad things we do; it's something fundamental to our nature. It's a deep heart-sickness like a terminal cancer. If you want perhaps the most sweeping definition of sin in the Bible you'll find it in Romans 14:23 "...For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin." Anything that doesn't come out of a heart of trust in God is sin. **Sin is preferring anything to God.**

- a. It is the glory of God not honored, the holiness of God not revered, the greatness of God not admired, the power of God not praised, the truth of God not sought, the wisdom of God not esteemed, the beauty of God not treasured, the goodness of God not savored, the faithfulness of God not trusted, the promises of God not believed, the commandments of God not obeyed, the justice of God not respected, the wrath of God not feared, the grace of God not cherished, the presence of God not prized, the person of God not loved.
2. Yes, we do sinful things all the time, but like fruit on a tree cannot grow without branches, trunk and roots our sinful actions have a root that is rejection of God. Just like a sickness inside the body will produce symptoms outside the body, the corruption in our hearts produces sinful acts. Jesus says elsewhere that out of our hearts come evil things, they don't just come out of nowhere.
- ii. And as God's creatures living in a world that God has made, it brings massive dishonor upon God and shame upon ourselves to ignore him. Last time I visited Japan I did a lot of home-stays with very generous people. Imagine if I was staying in somebody's house and using it as my own, totally ignoring the owner who graciously invited me and giving them no gift or thanks. Not even talking to them. Wouldn't that be an outrage? That is the outrage of sin. It's a pretty depressing image isn't it? But unless we understand how serious sin is, we won't see the wonder of this passage.

So with that in mind let's take a closer look at how Simon's sense of sin, and right and wrong works.

b. Simon's horizontal view (v36-40)

- i. In our passage the sinful woman learns that Jesus is eating with Simon and comes, uninvited to his house in order to meet Jesus. Think of it like this: we've all at some point had to give out invitations to dinner parties/wedding meals. There's always the question, who do you pick? Who gets to sit at the top table? Who is left out? What if the person you absolutely didn't want there showed up and joined in? Imagine you're at the reception and during the wedding dinner a drunken homeless man shows up. Worse than that, what if he comes right up to the groom and starts weeping openly near them, clinging to them! Shocking. You'd want him out of there. That's the tension here as this uninvited woman comes right up to Jesus and, verse 38 tells us, starts to weep over his feet, wipe them with her hair and anoint them with this expensive perfume. You can just imagine the awkward silence punctuated with the sound of her weeping and the smell of the ointment. Then in verse 39 we get a window into what's going on in Simon's head as he watches this.
 1. "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." He scorns Jesus as a religious fraud and the sinful woman as a person unworthy to be at his table.
 2. I think the reason for this is that Simon's whole worldview is one that uses sin as a yardstick to measure people against one another. **His view of sin is what we could call horizontal;** it only takes into account how he measures up against others, or how they measure up to him. In his worldview a prostitute and a Pharisee are so far apart in terms of righteousness that they might as well be on different planets.

3. Simon uses his idea of what makes a sinner to protect his conscience with self-righteousness; to make him feel as if he's more acceptable or moral than this woman. In fact, a good example of how Simon sees himself is given by Paul when he describes himself pre-conversion in Philippians 3: "circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless."
 - a. We may not put it as confidently but we tend to think of ourselves in the same way. Ever asked anyone if they're a sinner? Nine times out of ten you get the response "I try to be good." We convince ourselves that **to be blameless is to have good intentions**. Not to be perfect, just not to be 'bad'. Just as Simon makes comparisons between himself and the woman, we can make comparisons between ourselves and others, "at least I'm not like *that* person."

c. Jesus' vertical view, sin as debt (v40-43)

But Jesus answers and corrects Simon's thoughts with a story, and makes a very important point about sin.

- i. And you can see it in v40-43: "Two people owed money to a certain money-lender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon replied, 'I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.'" What's interesting here is Jesus links **sin to debt**.
- ii. Now, that's language that we're familiar with. Where debt is involved there has to be a creditor (someone who lends the money) and a debtor (someone who owes the money) Think about mortgages, loans and debt. Most of us will know what it's like to be in debt. The emotional strain and stress of it. The fear and the anxiety. The burden. Sometimes it feels as if the interest rate increases faster than what I'm paying in.
- iii. Jesus is reminding us that our sins work up a debt that we cannot repay - all wrongdoing deserves to be repaid, we all believe that. When someone wrongs us we immediately want it to be put right, don't we? But what about our wrongdoing in front of God? What about all the times we've turned our backs on him, neglected him, failed to trust him? It's sin. Remember '...whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.' (Rom 14:23b) Every time you have done something and failed to trust God in it, you've sinned against him.
- iv. When a person commits a crime they must work off their 'debt to society'. The more serious the crime, the greater the debt. Now that's on a human scale, but what about with God?
 1. **Because God is infinite, our sin against him has infinite consequences.** Therefore, if one single sin is enough to rack up an infinite debt between you and God, how about a month of sins? A year? Ten? Twenty? Fifty? Can you imagine how impossibly great the debt you owe your creator is?
- v. Oh, you may not feel like you're a sinner by your *own* measure, but what about God's?
 1. Have you trusted him as the only God?
 2. Have you made anything else besides Him your reason for living?
 3. Have you treated God's name with reverence?
 4. Have you loved your neighbour as yourself?
 5. Have you always been truthful about yourself and others?
 How do you stack up?
- vi. Not fair! You might say. The standard is too high!
 1. When we judge people we measure them against a standard of what we think is 'right'. That's only fair. But what about when God judges us, his

creations, what's the measure for him to use? Isn't it his own absolute perfection? If we judge others by our own standards, why is it unfair for God to do that as well?

2. See, we *owe* God a life, lived in perfect love and obedience to him. **Can you pay that back?**

vii. But the woman realises this man Jesus has come to bridge the great divide. She knows full well how far she falls short of perfection. She knows even falling a little short of it is the same as falling the furthest distance away. *That's why in Jesus' story neither debtor could pay their debt back: v42a* "Neither of them had the money to pay him back". **The truth is there are two debtors in the room, only one doesn't know it.**

viii. There was one time I was looking after my parent's house with their cats, and they had a large tree in the garden. One evening I realized that the cat had failed to come in for food (which it always did at the same time). I searched and searched around the house and garden but couldn't find it. Then after hours I went to the tree and looked up, and there was the cat stuck up the tree. I hadn't realized the situation I was in until I looked up. We will not realize the situation we are in with God until will 'look up' and put him in the picture.

*So we've seen that Jesus **refocuses us to know that we're sinners before God**, to see our wrongdoing with God at the centre, not ourselves, and that's a really important step in coming to know Jesus personally. But that's not the end. We're going to briefly move on now to the good news in this story, that even though we are sinners we can **rejoice that Jesus is a great savior**.*

II. Rejoice that Christ is a great saviour

a. **Simon vs. the sinful woman**

i. You can see this reflected in the different people's reactions to Jesus. Let's look at v44-47 where he lays it out for us.

1. Simon's self-righteousness leads to scorn of Jesus. All he is to Simon is a fake prophet.

2. The sinful woman's knowledge of her sinfulness leads to so much love and peace. This woman loves Jesus so much.

a. I'm sure many of us would look at this and feel a little awkward at how undignified this woman is being. But this really hit home for me. It forced me to ask: how is my love for Jesus? And actually in comparison it looks cold.

i. Do I rejoice to pray to him? Read about him in his word? Talk about him? Prepare a sermon? It made me uncomfortable.

b. If that's you as well, maybe we've forgotten how sinful we are, and how wonderful Christ's love for us is. Remember: 'whoever is forgiven little, loves little.' It's so easy for us as Christians to absorb the mindset around us that we're essentially good people.

3. But we can see in this passage that if you think you're a good person you'll just see Jesus as another religious teacher. But if you know you're a sinner you'll see him for who he truly is.

b. **The creditor who became the debtor**

i. And who is he? It's the question on everybody's lips: "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" (v. 48-49)

ii. Well, he tells the woman her sins are forgiven. Yes, he acknowledges like everyone else in the room this person's a sinner, but he doesn't just point out sin like a religious person would, he provides the solution. He can actually do away with sin. He also says to the woman, "Your faith has saved you, go in peace." (v. 50) This sinner can have peace.

1. Have you come here tonight feeling you're a wretched sinner? Please know that Jesus stands ready to forgive you if you'll put your trust in him to take

away all your sins. There is infinite grace in him to wash even the foulest clean.

2. This woman wasn't kept away from Jesus by her sin and shame, it's what drove her literally to the feet of Christ for forgiveness. Actually it's Simon's own self-righteousness that stops him from doing the same. His good deeds and pride in them stop him from coming to receive forgiveness for them (which he desperately needs).
 - iii. But how can Jesus make these outrageous claims? How can he claim to forgive people's sins against God? Because he is God. The one to whom every debt is owed. And this creditor has come not to claim the debt, or even to wipe it away as if it means nothing. He's come to carry it to the cross. **The creditor will become the debtor; he takes on the debt that we couldn't pay.** One so huge that the only thing costly enough to pay it off was the life of the Son of God. He had every right to 'send the bailiffs round', to kick in your door and drag you off to judgment, but he didn't. Instead he died to clear your debt forever. That's how much he loves you. That's how great a saviour he is.
- c. A few points of application to finish as we think about this image of Christ.
 - i. Who is welcome at our table? Do we exclude people like Simon? If we know we're a sinner we can welcome any kind of person because we won't feel better than them or proud.
 - ii. Religion has no answer for sin, the Gospel does. Religion can only condemn, the Gospel can heal. Simon should have been merciful to the woman, but he only judges her. Are we merciful to people whose lives are a mess? Do we realize that without Jesus our lives would be a real mess? We have no grounds to judge anybody. Without the grace of God we'd be equally lost.
 - iii. Live debt free! The joy of being a Christian is knowing that your debt of sin before God has been paid by Jesus. You can live with joy, peace and hope.

Because the heart of the good news about Jesus is: you are worth more than you could possibly imagine, and more loved than you ever dared hope. If you are here this morning knowing you're a sinner, Jesus says to you (if you will ask him to forgive you and receive him as your Lord) "your faith has saved you, go in peace."