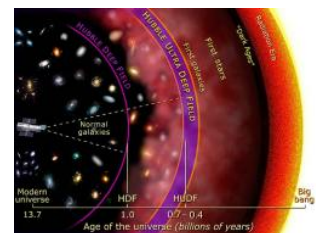


## I. Introduction

Good morning! I am told that the Vietnamese people have a saying, "When eating a fruit, think of the person who planted the tree." This is a beautiful saying that speaks of the gratitude that we should have for those who have come before us and prepared so many things for us to enjoy. Gratitude is a wonderful virtue and we would all do well to cultivate an attitude of gratitude.



If we take this a step further, we realize that ultimately all things are from the hand of God. If God had not created the heavens and the earth, there would not be any trees. If God had not created humankind, there would be no ancestors. Life itself is a gift from God. Some people try to deny this, but if we think about it carefully, it is obvious. Scientists are good at measuring and describing things, and we all know that there are scientific theories which attempt to describe the processes of how the universe and life began. But, regardless of whether the theories are correct or incorrect, in the end, describing things and processes does not really answer the question of why. Why does the universe exist? What is the cause of existence? Everything in human experience has a cause and a reason, so to say that there is no reason or cause for the universe is absurd.



The Bible reveals that the original cause and ultimate reason for the world and everything in it is God. The Creator God is the ultimate source and provider of all things. When we consider this, it is obvious that we should be grateful to God. One person may express their gratitude with hands lifted in worship and thanksgiving for the beauty of nature.



Another person may express their gratitude in quiet prayer at their kitchen table. But we should all take time to say, "Thank you, God!" in our daily lives. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul reminds us of the importance of gratitude with these words (Colossians 3:16), "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." Hopefully, that is a pretty good description of what we are doing here this morning. Today's Scripture reading also speaks about gratitude toward the Lord; let's take a look at Luke 7:36-50.

## II. Scripture Luke 7:36-50 (NIV)

[36] Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. [37] When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, [38] and 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 men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. [42] Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" [43] Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled." "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--for she loved much. But he who 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."

### III. Teaching

In this passage the woman comes to the place where Jesus is a guest at dinner and dramatically expresses her gratitude to Jesus. She weeps. She washes Jesus' feet with her tears and wipes them with her hair. She kisses His feet and pours perfume on them. Her actions are a portrait of a person whose heart is so filled with gratitude that they cannot restrain themselves from expressing their feelings. Scripture does not tell us what her sin was, but only that she lived a sinful life and her sins were many.

It seems very likely that this woman already knew Jesus and was looking for an opportunity to express her gratitude to Him. So she comes to Jesus at Simon's home, and Jesus declares that her sins are forgiven. But it is not her actions that saved her, **Luke 7:50** tells us, "**Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."**" The woman was not saved by her actions; she was saved by her faith in Jesus. No one can be saved by their own efforts, no matter how beautiful their works. But Jesus accepts all who come to Him in faith.

Here is a picture of an outside dining area in a modern courtyard. It is probably quite different than Simon's home. But I wanted to share it because I think Simon and his guests were probably eating in the courtyard of Simon's home. It is said that in Jesus' time wealthy people often entertained guests in the courtyard. Along with the dinner, there would often be some kind of speech or entertainment and poor people were allowed to gather along the outside wall and listen and watch.



In this situation, it would be easy for the woman to suddenly enter. Philippe Champaigne painted the scene like this. The woman is very bold to come in without an invitation, but she is not bold enough to face Jesus directly. Instead, she comes up behind Him, and she is able to reach His feet. And there, at the feet of Jesus, she expresses her gratitude and love.



**Luke 7:39, "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.""** Sometimes people get the idea that the woman was a prostitute. However, there was no law against being touched by a prostitute, but there was a law against physical contact with gentiles. Simon, "**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.""** Simon raises two issues, the identity of the woman, and her sinfulness. If the woman was a gentile, this would explain why Simon sees two problems here.

Simon is speaking to himself, perhaps muttering in protest, or perhaps reflecting on the situation. Either way, it appears that Simon had considered the possibility that Jesus might be a prophet. If so, then Simon might have invited Jesus to dinner in order to make his own evaluation. But now Simon's assumptions are getting in the way. Simon assumes that a true prophet would never allow himself to be touched by such a woman. Like Simon, we also are often confused by the things the Lord does because we have made incorrect assumptions. We should be careful about our assumptions concerning what the Lord might do or not do. His ways are higher than ours.

We don't really know why Simon invited Jesus, but it is clear that Simon did not treat Jesus as an honored guest. It was common courtesy to wash the feet of guests, to greet them with a kiss, and to anoint their head with oil. But Simon did none of these things for Jesus. We don't know why, but Simon was rude to Jesus, and when Simon also displayed a judgmental attitude toward the woman, Jesus rebuked him.

**Luke 7:44, “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.”** Jesus asked Simon, **“Do you see this woman?”** What do you think? Did Simon see her? Did Simon see this woman whose past was full of suffering and sin, but whose heart was now overflowing with love and gratitude? Did Simon see her as a human being, a person, loved by God?

What about us, do we see people as human beings that God loves? Or do we see them only as shopkeepers, homeless men, office workers, and store clerks? Like Simon, we often fail to see. But if we learn to see people as Jesus sees them, then our hearts will overflow with love for our neighbor.



Let’s take a closer look at the story of the moneylender. This is a short story, but it has a powerful message. **Luke 7:41-42, “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 canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?”** Simon must have been very surprised at the idea of a moneylender who would cancel debts just because people could not pay. It would be more profitable to have the men thrown into jail in order to force their relatives and friends to pay the debts. Grace and mercy are rare in the world of finance.

Still, Simon correctly answered that the man with the larger debt would love the moneylender more. The message was clear; the woman’s expressions of love were the result of her being forgiven for many sins. Her debt had been great, but it was canceled; and her heart was filled with love and thankfulness. Jesus then announced what the story had already shown; the woman’s love was proof that her sins had been forgiven.

But notice also the man who owed only fifty denarii. He also was unable to pay his debt. Some people are worse sinners than others, but every human being is basically in the same situation. We are all debtors and we are all unable to pay our debts. Our only hope is for the One we owe to have mercy and cancel our debts. Praise God! The Lord is merciful! He forgives the sins of all who trust in Him.

There are two things here that startle me though. First, I am startled by the way the story portrays the Lord as a moneylender. Moneylenders do not always have the best of reputations! (Art: The Moneylender and his Wife by Quentin Massys 1514) But it is a good illustration. Our sins are like massive debts that we cannot repay. Our only hope is for the Lord to forgive us. Isn’t it wonderful that the Lord forgives our debts when we trust in Him?



And when we realize that the Lord has forgiven us, then our heart overflows with love and gratitude. The second thing that startles me is that the story implies that Simon also is forgiven. Both debtors are forgiven. Does this mean that Simon also had faith in Jesus? It doesn’t seem likely. Perhaps this part is prophetic and Simon came to faith in Jesus later.

#### IV. Conclusion

Take a look at this 16<sup>th</sup> century painting of Saint Francis of Assisi. Francis is famous for his love of all living things. This painting shows the moment when Francis first came to faith in Jesus. Heaven is bright with light and the angels are celebrating. I think Cigoli must have based this work on **Luke 15:10, “In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”**



Our sins are like a mountain of debt that we can never repay, but the Lord offers each of us the opportunity to trust in Him and be forgiven of all of our debts. And whenever someone repents of their sins and turns to Jesus, there is rejoicing in heaven. There was rejoicing when the sinful woman placed her faith in Jesus. And, I believe

there was rejoicing when Simon the Pharisee eventually did the same. If you have not yet placed your faith in Jesus, then you have the opportunity to cause rejoicing in heaven by trusting in Jesus today.

And for all of us who have already trusted in Jesus and been forgiven of our many sins, what should our attitude be? Love for our Savior and gratitude forever! Amen! Let's pray.

## **V. Closing Prayer**

