

Forgiven Much, Loving Much

Sermon Title: Forgiven Much, Loving Much

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References: **Luke 7**, Luke 7:36-50; Ephesians 2:1; Ephesians 2:12; Romans 3:23; Ezekiel 18:20; Titus 3:5; Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 1:16; Romans 6:23; 1 John 3:2; Matthew 25:21; Mark 2:5; Mark 2:9; Mark 2:11; Romans 5:20; Romans 6:1-2; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5; Isaiah 61:10; Genesis 15:6; Hebrews 11:17; Mark 12:30-31

Introduction: The Meaning of Baptism and the Gospel

Thank you for coming out. Thank you for being online. Thank you for wanting to learn about the Lord Jesus. Amen.

Sometimes when the Word of God is spoken, I scratch my head and I wonder what people were listening to. For example, on Sunday I was at a baptism, and the brother who was preaching preached the gospel simply, soundly, well, and thoroughly as he explained what the gospel was, or what baptism was—a demonstration publicly, a living parable of the death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as our death to our old selves, and we come out of the water in newness of life. It's something that John might say, "It's to be born again." I guess Peter would say that also.

And when we think about being born again, you know, you can't be born by yourself. You can't become a Christian all by yourself. You need the work of Jesus Christ to trust in His person, His life, and His work. You can make yourself an atheist. You can make yourself a Buddhist. You can make yourself a Muslim, but you can't make yourself a Christian. Only God can do that.

And it's something that I get confused on when people are... Like this past Sunday, when the message was so clear, and then the fellow being baptized says, "I'm looking forward to having my sins washed away in baptism." And I felt like sticking my fingers through my ears and rubbing them back and forth, and figured I must have heard something wrong, and I need to have my ears cleared up. Because he obviously didn't hear the same thing that I heard. Or probably in my gruffness and, I'm going to say, **Neanderthal** tendencies—sorry, Phoebe, for the word **Neanderthal**—I would have taken a towel between his ears and given a good rub, because he obviously didn't hear the message.

And so we'd like to think a little bit, because there's confusion in the Christian world about certain things, and we'd like to consider them a little bit this evening. So we would like to open our Bibles to Luke chapter 7, please. Luke chapter 7 and verse 35. This is, if you can find the tape of it—and I don't know where it came from; I think it came from one of the Anvil Island retreats that Harold used to run on Labor Day weekend—this is absolutely my favorite message that Joe Reese ever gave.

The Two Debtors: Luke 7

And it says this:

[Luke 7:36-50 NKJV]

³⁶ Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. ³⁷ And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, ³⁸ and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil. ³⁹ Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, "This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner."

⁴⁰ And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." So he said, "Teacher, say it." ⁴¹ "There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?" ⁴³ Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have rightly judged."

⁴⁴ Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. ⁴⁵ You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. ⁴⁶ You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. ⁴⁷ Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little."

⁴⁸ Then He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." ⁴⁹ And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" ⁵⁰ Then He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

The Lord will bless the public reading of His words to us.

I think this is a beautiful, beautiful story of the response to the gospel, the response to the good news. Because when we share the gospel, I think sometimes we leave off how desperate, how far away, how separated from God we actually are.

The Depth of Our Debt

Sometimes in the olden days when Harold could eat food like pizza—that was like 40 years ago—he would take some of us young people out to Olympia Pizza and he would buy the pizza for us. And we'd say, "Thank you very much." It was a good gesture, it was a great gesture, especially to university students—some of us were—who were a little tight on our budgets, and it was a lovely thing. When the Buds would invite us up on a Sunday to have roast beef, Shirley would invite us out once in a while, and we'd go to... What's the chicken place called? I forgot. It's across the road from Olympia Pizza, but I forgot what it's called. Swiss Chalet. Swiss Chalet. And what's necessary there is a hug and a thanks.

But what if it was something like, "You need a new liver? I will give you a liver. You need a kidney? I'll give you a kidney." You need a certain thing that is extremely hard to come by, and you get that kidney or you get that liver. Okay. Would your response be a little more than, "Thank you very much"? It would be, wouldn't it? Because it's a greater gift that you're receiving. And that's part of the story here and the juxtaposition—or the contrast, sorry—between the woman at Jesus' feet and Simon the Pharisee.

You see, there's this huge separation between us and God. It's immense. It's so great that there is nothing on earth that can bring us across that gap. There is no bridge. There is no technology. There is absolutely, positively nothing that can fill in that gap. Our sins have separated us from the eyes of our God.

[Ephesians 2:1 NKJV]

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins,

[Ephesians 2:12 NKJV]

that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of

Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

[Romans 3:23 NKJV]

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

[Ezekiel 18:20 NKJV]

The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.

It is

[Titus 3:5 NKJV]

not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,

as Paul writes to Titus in chapter 3.

[Ephesians 2:8-9 NKJV]

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.

There is absolutely, positively nothing we can do. And that's what we're getting saved from.

And so, sometimes I see people that say they're Christians and they live just like nothing ever happened. "Yeah, I raised my hand. Yeah, I went forward. Yeah, I said a prayer. I'm a Christian." But there's no life-transforming power in their lives. But Paul writes to the Romans and he says:

[Romans 1:16 NKJV]

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

It's the power of God not only to save us from

[Romans 6:23 NKJV]

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

not only from the penalty of sin—separation from God—but from the power of sin in our lives, to transform us from what we used to be and on His way to making us to what we will be.

The Transforming Power of the Gospel

There was a time when Lois was there and she received the Lord Jesus as her Savior. And the Lord worked in her life as a teenager, and the Lord worked in her life as a young lady, and she went out to Africa as a single woman. Michener, I think, was her last name. I still remember praying for her once a month when her day came up. Amen.

And then one day it got changed to Mass, and she was growing and her ways changed, but she was dedicated to the Lord. And they commended her from the assembly there in Pennsylvania, and she went to Africa, and there she was serving happily and faithfully. And then Bert came along and added to her joy to serve happily and faithfully together. And as she went along, different things happened in their lives, and the Lord was making her a lot more like Him the whole time.

And then 1 John chapter 3 says:

[1 John 3:2 NKJV]

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

You see, this is the power of God in salvation, not only to save us from the penalty of sin, but from the power of sin. And when she was a young girl, there were those youthful lusts. I don't know what they were. A lot of girls have this dream ever since they were little to get married one day. And she just put it all in the Lord's hand. We said, Stephen's had that same idea. She waited way longer than anybody else I ever knew. But the Lord put aside those things, okay? That's something that all the girls dream about, but "I'm going to serve the Lord and I'm going to go to Africa." And the Lord was sanctifying her. He was making her

more like Him. And as she obeyed, things went on and on. Imagine the Lord speaking to her at the judgment, saying:

[Matthew 25:21 NKJV]

His lord said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord."

All is peace forevermore on that happy golden shore. It's a wonderful thing. And this is what the gospel does.

But if you've never figured out that you're so separated from God, that there's nothing that could bring us to God, we'll never have that love for God. If we think that Jesus is just like a vitamin that we take to get a little bit better, if we think of Him like an antibiotic that we take to get better, if we think of Him like eating orange juice or drinking orange juice just to get better—"I'm okay, but I'm a little bit down right now with sin, and we need to get over the hump. And once we get rid of the fever, we'll be fine." No. Our fever is 50 degrees; it ain't 40 degrees. We're dead in trespasses and sin. There's no medicine that's going to help us. Jesus came not to bring healing to the righteous, but to the unrighteous. That's how far gone we are.

And it depends on how much we... You see, was it a pizza that Jesus paid for? Or is He giving you life and life eternal? No, a relationship with God, restoration back to God, reconciliation with God. Because, you see, until we know how big the bill is, we're not going to know how to respond. Simon had absolutely, positively no idea how to respond. But this woman who was a sinner, she knew how to respond because she knew how far she was. She was down.

If someone gave you the chance to have life, would you get down on your knees? Would you kiss their feet? Would you anoint their feet with oil? Would you wash them with your hair if you have hair? That's what this woman did. She was so grateful for having Jesus in her presence.

The Authority to Forgive Sins

And then Jesus said, "Well, your sins are forgiven."

"Who is this that can forgive sins?"

"Well, you see, I'm God, and I can forgive sins." We learned about that in Mark chapter 1, didn't we? Or is it chapter 2? It might be chapter 2.

[Mark 2:5 NKJV]

When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you."

"Who's this that says they can forgive sins? Only God can forgive sins."

"Well, which is easier to say? 'Your sins are forgiven,' or 'Rise up and walk'?"

Which is easier to say? Any Tom, Dick, or Harry can say, "Your sins are forgiven." Whether that's true or not is another story altogether, but it's easier to say it. But if I were to say, or someone were to say, "Rise up and walk," now you want to see the evidence. And so that you know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, which is easier to say?

[Mark 2:9 NKJV]

Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, "Arise, take up your bed and walk'?"

Which is easier to say? Any Tom, Dick, or Harry can say, "Your sins are forgiven." Whether that's true or not is another story altogether, but it's easier to say it. But if I were to say, or someone were to say, "Rise up and walk," now you want to see the evidence. And so that you know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins:

[Mark 2:11 NKJV]

"I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house."

And did that man show any faith? Yes, he did. What did he do? He grabbed his bed, and he rose up, and he walked. It wasn't that his friends' faith saved him. I've heard a million preachers say—well, maybe not a million, but a lot of wrong preachers say—that it was the faith of their friends that saved him. No. He obeyed the Lord himself, and he took his bed, and he rose up, and he walked. It wasn't his friends' faith that saved him; it was his own faith. And don't ever forget that. Your mummy's faith won't save you. Your daughter's faith won't save you. Your husband's faith won't save you. Only your own faith will save you.

Grace and the Reality of Sin

You see, there's this enormous debt. And when somebody says they're a Christian and they don't have the accompanying joy, the life-changing testimony... Some people think, "Well, where grace abounds..."—sorry, I'm saying this backwards—where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.

[Romans 5:20 NKJV]

Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more,

And then they go on to chapter... They stop, and before they get to chapter six, well, then they think, "Well, I can continue in sin then, that grace may abound, because where sin abounded, grace much more abounded." But Paul was much smarter than those people, and he put it in the pen to the Romans before people even started to be able to think that way. He said:

[Romans 6:1-2 NKJV]

¹ What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? ² Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?

We would never do that, because if we do that, we're not understanding grace. We're not understanding what God has forgiven. We're not understanding how much sin we have. We're not understanding how separated we are from God.

The night in which Jesus was betrayed, He went to the garden of Gethsemane, didn't He? And He sweat, as it were, drops of blood. The experts would tell us that that is a very rare condition that comes from a high, extreme amount of stress. What was Jesus stressing over? The fact that He was going to die? The fact that He was going to get nailed to the cross? I would hesitate to say that. I would say that He may have felt that stress because He had never, ever, ever, ever, never been separated from His Father.

And when He was made sin:

[2 Corinthians 5:21 NKJV]

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

says Paul in 2 Corinthians 5. And:

[1 Peter 2:22 NKJV]

"Who committed no sin,
Nor was deceit found in His mouth";

writes Peter. And:

[1 John 3:5 NKJV]

And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.

writes John. He's going to be separated?

Does sin ever cause that kind of response in our lives? Sometimes we just say, "God, forgive me," and we don't even weep over it. And Jesus sweat as it were drops of blood, understanding the enormity of separation that would happen from God.

You see, if we understand this, it begins to give us the life-changing ability for God to come in and transform our lives. Because we will be in His presence where there is a fullness of joy to be with Him. And we will want to dwell in the house of the Lord forever. And that, to me, means we're going to love praying with the saints. We're going to love praying on our own. We're going to love praying with our families. We're going to love praying with the brethren and the sisters. We're going to love reading the scriptures. We're going to love learning about the scriptures. We're going to love just sitting there reading them to our families. We're going to love reading them to our spouses. We're going to love just reading them for ourselves. We're just going to... This is where God is, and where God is, I want to be. We want to be with His people, because how can you say you love God and not love His people? How can you say you love the Head of the church and not love the body of the church? It's not natural. It's not rational.

The Completeness of God's Provision

And you see, when we understand how much we've been restored from, that helps us. But there's also a second part. We also need to understand the greatness and the completeness of the provision of God for our sin. You see, we might understand the greatness of the debt, but sometimes we don't understand the great provision of God for our death.

You see, some people think, "Well, yeah, Jesus died on the cross, but you have to be baptized, but you have to give a tithe, but you have to do this, and you have to do that." And they add on to the works of Jesus Christ because they don't understand the complete sacrifice, the complete work of what Jesus has done. And so they think by being good and by being perfect and by being pleasing... Because there's an awful lot of Christians that have this perfection complex. And I hear it from a lot of unbelievers: "You think you're better than me." Absolutely, positively, we're just one poor leper telling the others there's a provision made. And God has made the provision for you.

Because there is no life-changing power, there's no life-changing joy in thinking that Jesus did most of the work, but I've got to do a little bit more to maintain my salvation. But when we realize that Jesus lived the life that we didn't live, when we realize that Jesus paid the price that we couldn't pay, and it wasn't just for our past sins, but there for all of our sins, and then His perfect righteousness is imputed to us—that God no longer sees Helen, that God no longer sees Cindy, that God no longer sees Josh. Our lives are hidden in God with Christ. It's not our righteousness. He's taken these old raggedy clothes and He's placed upon us:

[Isaiah 61:10 NKJV]

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

that Jesus gives to us.

You see, this is God's provision. There was our debt, but this is the completeness of His provision. When we understand that, we have to get rid of ideas that preachers bring. Some preachers teach that you have to be perfect, that there's this thing called "Lordship salvation," and you just can't possibly mess up your life at all, and if you do mess up, that means you're not saved. No way, Jose.

We're not what we were, but we're not what we're going to be. Abraham is a huge example of faith in the Bible, isn't he? Chapter 15:

[Genesis 15:6 NKJV]

And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

And Abraham had all these things where he's building altars and building altars and sacrificing. And even though he was worshiping God, he slipped up a few times. He told a lie or two. He committed adultery, even with his wife's permission. He messed up big time. But all the way through the good and the bad, God was changing him and transforming him and making him like the Lord Jesus. And then by the time we get to chapter 22 of Genesis, there he is offering his son without any quibbling, arguing—sorry, Phoebe, he didn't argue.

[Hebrews 11:17 NKJV]

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,

It's a wonderful thing. And this is the idea behind us understanding what this woman was going through. She understood how great a debt, and she understood how great the Man was in front of her, the Lord Jesus Christ. And she couldn't help but respond with all of her life over what He was doing for her in her life.

And so may the Lord use these thoughts to help us to think, create thoughts about what God has provided for us, and encourage us to respond with a love and a heart, saying:

[Mark 12:30-31 NKJV]

³⁰ And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. ³¹ And the second, like it, is this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

I'm going to love my brothers and sisters in the Lord in the very same way. I'm going to love the lost in the very same way. May the Lord give us much grace to see His work in our lives, for His honor and His glory.

Closing Prayer

Father, we would just like to thank You this evening for Your goodness to us. We think of the story of the woman who loved much. And Father, we confess sometimes in our lives, in our hearts, we don't love You much. And that's evidenced in how we love other people. We pray Your forgiveness.

And we know that You know our hearts. And we know that You know the motivations of our hearts and the intents of our hearts. And our prayer is that You would make us more loving to You. And by doing so, we would show it in our love for others. We commend ourselves into Your hands, asking for You to give much grace to help us be more like the Lord Jesus. For His honor and His glory, we pray.

Amen. Amen.