

Keynotes from Pastor Tims' am Sermon on 17/5/2020

Jesus friend of sinners – Devotion

(Please read these notes whilst listening to the sermon audio file.)

Luke 7 verses 36-50

³⁶ One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. ³⁷ And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, ³⁸ and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. ³⁹ Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." ⁴⁰ And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher."

⁴¹ "A certain money-lender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" ⁴³ Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." ⁴⁴ Then turning towards the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵ You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. ⁴⁷ Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." ⁴⁸ And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." ⁴⁹ Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" ⁵⁰ And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

We are all hardwired for worship. We may gaze at an amazing view and take great delight in it. At that moment the view has our heart. We are worshipping the view. The greater the object of our worship, the greater our joy and sense of awe. God created this world, so if we get a sense of awe and joy from contemplating what is

around us, how much greater will be the sense of awe and joy we get from contemplating its creator.

We were created to be worshippers of God rather than worshippers of the things of this world, yet we find it hard to worship a God we can't see. We are aware we should be filled with joy, and Christians who have a clearer understanding of who God is are often the most joyful people. However, often we don't spend time worshipping God during the week, reserving that for Sundays but then

- We come with a sense of duty rather than delight
- Our minds wander during the prayers and the sermon
- We sing with our mouths but our hearts aren't really engaged

How can we worship and serve God with joy and true devotion?

The key to loving Jesus and to joy filled worship and service is **v47** Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.

- We will never love and serve Christ joyfully unless we really know how much he has done for us.
- We will love Jesus (and therefore love God) most when we know how greatly we have been forgiven, and the cost of our forgiveness.

Jesus has gone to eat at a dinner party hosted by Simon. As a Pharisee, Simon cared deeply about keeping the law of Moses, believing himself to be close to God in so doing. Uninvited, someone described as a woman of the city, a sinner, comes into the party. She had probably been a prostitute but something has changed for her.

Now she is a worshipper of God, as we see by her actions.

- She kneels at the feet of Jesus, with tears of joy flowing so freely that they wet his feet
- She lets down her hair (something no self-respecting Jewish lady would do) and begins to dry his feet
- She kisses his feet and anoints them with perfumed oil from an alabaster jar

Everyone present would have known what her life had been and would have expected her to hide away in shame, but she takes the role of a servant, kneeling at the feet of Jesus. Simon doesn't say anything to the woman or to Jesus but only **thinks to himself** that Jesus can't really be a prophet or he wouldn't have let the woman touch him **v39** If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.

Jesus responds in two ways – first to Simon, then to the woman.

1. **Jesus' response to Simon** proves that he is more than a prophet – he answers what Simon is only thinking. He does know who the woman is, but also sees what is in Simon's heart. As the searcher of all our hearts, he knows us intimately, seeing all of our failings.

- Simon thinks that, having kept the law, he is good enough for God.
- Jesus looks beyond his external actions, seeing that he is far away from God, not having a heart that loves him.

To expose this, Jesus uses a parable that he applies to Simon:

vv41-43 "A certain money-lender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" ⁴³ Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly."

When Jesus asks Simon "Do you see this woman?" (**v44**) we realise that Simon hadn't really seen her, even though her presence was obvious. His self-righteousness meant that:

- He sees her as she used to be – a sinner (the big debtor in the parable). He could not see her as she is now - a forgiven devoted worshipper of the living God. He was blind to the grace of God at work in her life
- In comparison with her, he assumed he wasn't a sinner (or maybe only the one with the smaller debt) because he had kept the rules. He was blind to his own need of salvation.

Simon's attitude to God is exposed when God comes to his house in the person of his son Jesus.

vv44-46: I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵ You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.

Simon fails to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus, worship Jesus or show him any honour

Even if Simon sees himself as only owing the small debt, he still needs to acknowledge that he is a sinner, who can't pay the debt himself. His self-righteousness, reliant as he is on keeping rules, prevents this.

2. Jesus' response to the woman vv48-50 And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." ⁴⁹ Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" ⁵⁰ And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Jesus shows us that it is the woman's faith that has saved her, not her actions (v50). At some point previously, she must have heard Jesus teaching. Perhaps she heard him say 'all you who are loaded with care, come to me and I will give you rest'. Loaded down with the care of guilt because of her sin, she came to him and found:

- He was gentle, unlike the men who had abused her
- He accepted her, unlike the self-righteous Pharisees who had shunned her
- Through him, she could come to God, have her many sins forgiven and be washed clean

Hearing that Jesus was in town, she came to offer him worship. She was so devoted to him that nothing is too costly:

- There is a cost to her personally to go into this house where people hate her and are embarrassed by her, but she knows Jesus doesn't hate her and is not ashamed of her.
- There is a cost to breaking the alabaster jar of perfume, but that doesn't compare to the treasure she's found in Jesus.

Her devotion is a response to the grace that Jesus has shown her.

What does Jesus do for her? In front of all those who are sitting in judgement on her, he declares her to be a forgiven sinner. He shows that she is now accepted by God. The guests rightly ask **v49** “Who is this, who even forgives sins?”. **Since only God can forgive sins, Jesus is showing that he is not only the one who searches hearts and knows all our thoughts, but he is also the God who becomes a friend to sinners and forgives them.**

- When Jesus was crucified, he was mocked with the words ‘he saved others, himself he cannot save’ These words were used mockingly, but they were true. Jesus had to die to put right the wrong others had done, so he could not save himself. Only in so doing could he show this woman (and us) such grace.

What does this teach us?

We do not have Jesus here, so we cannot worship as the woman did, but Jesus does call us to joyfully worship God, repent of sin, and serve him and his people. We will never love and serve Jesus with joy unless we really know how much he has done for us, which means we need to know:

- how holy God is, but also how gracious he is
- how sinful we really are and how dependent we are on his grace

We need to:

1. **Confess our coldness to God** – we don’t love him as we ought to, or as we would like to. We need to confess that often we find worship dull, repentance hard, serving a duty and his people annoying.
2. **Meditate on Christ and his sacrificial death on the cross for us** – in the cross we see both the holiness of God and his grace. We need to spend time thinking through what the Bible teaches about its meaning so that we begin to see with greater clarity that holiness and grace.
3. **Ask God to search our hearts** – not to condemn us but to draw us to repentance.

As we do this, we will come to a place of maturity where we see that our walk with God isn’t about keeping rules, but about seeing with ever greater clarity that he is

holy and we are sinful. Then we will grasp in ever greater measure that he is gracious and we are utterly dependent on that grace.

We will understand that nothing is too costly to do for him. Our greatest delight will be to worship, repent and serve him, and to love his people, and those who are not yet saved.