

Unforgiven

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[0 : 00] Most wonderful, most powerful words penned by David through the power of the Holy Spirit. Now let's return to the chapter that we read together in Luke's Gospel chapter 7 in our ongoing study of the Gospel message through Luke's account that we're given.

And this is a great passage, wonderful passage. It's like a Russian doll when I was, when Gurhan and Elchin were last here, not immediately this last week, but when they visited previously, they had been in Azerbaijan and brought Katrina and I and the family a Russian doll, which is wonderful hand-painted Russian-type doll, you know, the type that you is in half and you open it and there's another one inside and you open it, there's another one inside.

I think it ended up being 10 or 12 dolls getting smaller in size. Wonderful, beautiful gift to give us. And this passage reminds me of that Russian doll because there just seems to be so much in it, the more that you unpack it, the more that we learn about Jesus, especially in his dealings with people and we learn and also are challenged in our own spirituality and our own Christian understanding by this great account.

There's an account like this in all of the Gospels, but this is unique. It's a different account to the other three that are similar. The other three are probably referring to the same event, but this is a separate story about Jesus and his meeting in Simon's house, but his unusual meeting with the woman that comes to anoint him.

So we have Jesus and we see Jesus. What I want to do today is look at Jesus with Simon and then Jesus with the woman and then I want us to pray and apply that Jesus with us in our lives.

[2 : 08] So looking at the way Jesus deals with these two characters and then seeing what we can learn from this. We're not going to apply it as we go along but towards the end. But please watch and see the different characters here and the way Jesus speaks with them from Holy Scripture.

We have Jesus being invited to Simon's house. Simon has invited him to his house for a meal. Simon is a Pharisee and generally in the Bible the Pharisees are viewed rather negatively unlike the Centurion that we looked at previously or looked at more positively.

But the Pharisees generally were a strict sect of the Jewish religion who tended to be self-righteous and proud and felt that God owed them their place in heaven because of their obedience and their righteousness and their goodness.

And we don't know why he invited Jesus to his house, but we surmise from the text that it wasn't for positive reasons. It wasn't because he loved Jesus and wanted to learn from him.

It may have been curiosity. It may have been to trip Jesus up if he was in his company. But we know that he certainly didn't act in a very hospitable or gracious way towards Jesus.

[3 : 30] We have that fantastic stage whisper that he gives in this chapter where he says, you know, when Jesus knew what kind of woman this is, you know, when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, I imagine that would be in some kind of stage whisper so that everyone else could hear it.

If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is that she's a sinner. So he's even doubting who he is. He's doubting that he's a prophet. He's doubting that he knows Simon. He's doubting that he knows this woman and what on earth is he doing? And generally Jesus exposes him in the most gentle of ways certainly, but strong ways about his coldness and his discourteous behavior and his patronizing behavior.

He didn't welcome Jesus even with the most basic of Jewish hospitality. He didn't have anyone wash his feet. He didn't anoint him with all. He didn't kiss him and welcome.

And so we get this picture just from the few short verses here that Simon really had Jesus invited to his house for maybe duplicitous reasons. It wasn't because he wanted to learn from the master.

[4 : 43] So there's Simon. How did Jesus respond? Well, Jesus accepted the invitation. Jesus went to his house. Jesus would have known Simon's heart and would have known Simon's motives as they were exposed throughout the event.

But what a saviour. He went to Simon's home into, as it were, the lion's den. And when he was there accepting even this rather cold invitation, he goes on to have something to say, something to tell Simon.

Simon, he says in verse 40, I have something to tell you. Simon, who is trapping who?

You think you've come here to trap me, to expose me, to make me stumble? But Simon, I have something to tell you. I know your heart.

I know what you need to hear, Simon, from me today. You think you know me, but you don't. You think I don't know you, but I do.

[6 : 00] And so Jesus makes clear that he is business with Simon, even though Simon had no idea of what that was. And he says the most remarkable thing to him, Simon.

Do you see this woman? Verse 44, Simon, do you see this woman? That is a great statement, and I had never noticed it before.

Simon, he says, do you see this woman? In other words, he's saying to her, Simon, in reality, you don't see this woman at all. You don't see the person who is there.

All you see is some kind of woman, an unclean woman. You don't see the person. You don't see what's happened in her life. You don't know her background or where she's come from.

In fact, it would be as well that she wasn't there because you don't see her. You're looking right through her. You have no compassion. You have no care. You have no interest. You can't see this woman here.

[7 : 05] You're only wanting to win an argument. You can't see her. Do you see this woman? And he exposes the fact that Simon hadn't even considered the woman.

If Jesus knew what kind of woman this was, he wouldn't have allowed her to touch him. Jesus is sitting there. Can I brush this out of sight?

Jesus says, Simon, look at this woman. See this person. And then he goes on to say, and I'm summarizing what he speaks to Jesus about, what Jesus speaks to him about, he says, basically in the title of the sermon, you're unforgiving.

You can't see this woman, he says, but then he goes on to say, you are unforgiving, Simon. You have no concept of what it means to be a believer, despite what you profess and despite the kind of life you live.

He goes on to tell this lovely parable about two people, and it doesn't need explaining, he owned money, one owned very little, one owned a lot. Which one will love the more? I suppose he says the one who had the bigger debt cancelled.

[8 : 21] You have judged correctly. He didn't understand that he owed God a debt. He didn't understand that he needed sins forgiven. He had no concept, even of the basic biblical norms of hospitality.

He wouldn't even treat a visitor to his house with the kind of respect that the Bible demands. He didn't expect that the Bible demanded for the Jewish believer, particularly for a Pharisee, who dotted all the eyes and stroked all the tees of God's law.

He was disrespectful at that level. But more so, he had no sense of his need of grace and forgiveness. He was going to stand before God and say, I've lived right.

I've ticked all the right boxes and I've obeyed your law. He had no concept of his need for forgiveness. And Jesus gives us, can I call it, a law of grace.

That's not a contradiction in terms. He gives the law of grace to whom much is forgiven. There will be much love, he says.

[9 : 28] He who, as he says at the end of verse 47, been forgiven little, loves little. Amazing truth that is still entirely applicable to ourselves.

And reveals the heart of, and the mystery of the gospel of Jesus Christ. That we can only understand him and his love and his grace properly.

And I say this carefully in the context of the fall. And of our sin and of our need. And it's in the context of our failure and our recognition of our failure as we open our hearts before God and see the selfishness and agreed in the independence.

It's only in that context of our failure that we can understand the depth and the glory and the majesty of his free and full love and acceptance.

It's only there that we can understand the cross. And the cross in all its glory and in all its mystery shows us God in a way that we would never otherwise have known.

[10 : 34] Now I understand there's mystery there. And I understand that's difficult. But it is the law of grace. It's the law of the gospel. That he who has been forgiven little loves little.

And if we have no sense of need and no sense of crying out to God we will not be Christians. We will not follow him. We will not serve him. When the times of testing come we will not follow Jesus Christ through.

If we have no need and if we don't recognize that it's not about ah well I suppose God made us and I suppose I should worship him now and again.

Unless there's a sense of recognizing his grace being willing to wash clean the slate of our heart before him. And give us a fresh life and a fresh understanding and a fresh future that allows us to skip and dance and laugh spiritually.

Because of what he's done we will never love him. If we're okay, if everything is together, if our lives are good, if we justify ourselves before God we will love him very little.

[11 : 49] Because well he hasn't given us much has he? I've done it all myself. He has no real place in my heart. It's a wonderful measure if we're looking for a measure of our own spiritual understanding and of our understanding of grace and our understanding of the gospel.

This passage is a great measure of our understanding and this verse is a great measure. He who has been forgiven little loves little. It shows us our understanding of grace, not just our cerebral knowledge of the truth but our understanding of grace in our hearts and of what it means to be a Christian.

So we see God unfolding that in his, Jesus unfolding that in his relationship with Simon. Can we move on to Jesus and the woman?

Now we're not told terribly much about this woman, we're not even given her name. Now there may be various reasons why we're not given her name. Was it to protect her identity? Because of her sinful past we don't know.

But what it does highlight is that she is nameless in this passage and would be pretty nameless in the society in which she lived.

[13 : 04] But it makes Christ's acceptance of her all the more powerful. All the more powerful in relation to his, can I say, condemnation of Simon.

That's the most unlikely of the two that Jesus speaks to with words of compassion and love and acceptance. In all probability, although we're not told that we're told she had a sinful life cell, sinful past, that is quite often referred to in Scripture as someone who was a prostitute in their life.

And we can presume from what is happening here that she has already heard about the message of Jesus and she's already been transformed by it. She's already recognized as a sinner who has come to Jesus Christ for cleansing, that he has accepted her and the messages that she can have a new life and can be forgiven and loved and accepted by God and transformed.

And this is her, as it were, showing that in this passage. It's real to her. It's not something that she's been at a religious meeting and something's happened and she goes into a corner with it, but that she recognizes.

And amazing changes happen. She's a sex slave. She had no self-worth. People didn't love prostitutes.

[14 : 30] It was a dirty profession. She would have been abused and rejected and neglected probably from childhood.

It would be a miserable experience and lifestyle, poverty-stricken, anonymity, horribly darting from one place to another, an awful life.

There's no glamour there. There's no pleasure there. It's a horrible, ugly life and a horrible, ugly heart that she would have felt herself.

Prostitutes are not people with high self-esteem and have value in themselves. Most of them have been abused since the womb or beyond the womb in their lives and have known nothing but degradation and rejection and abuse and people turning or seeing them as lumps of meat and not people.

And yet here she is and she has been redeemed. And she has been saved by the love and the message of Jesus Christ and she wants to acknowledge that and she wants to share that and she wants to reveal how much she loves him, the cost of her love as Jesus goes on to speak about. [15:57] So she plucks up the courage to find out where Jesus is and goes to Simon's house. Now it wouldn't be like our houses where she had to knock on the front doors and say, can I come in please? I want to anoint Jesus' feet.

It was in the Middle East and very often there eating places where maybe in a courtyard there was public very often and of course Jesus wouldn't be sitting at a table like Colin was sitting at the table there but he would be reclining with his right elbow leaning on the ground and his head nearest the kind of eating area and he would be stretched out with his feet stretched out.

Which is why it would make it possible for her to do what she could do because people could pass by and often if there was an important teacher in town people would come by and would listen as they ate and reclined, would listen to his teaching.

But she still, she moved from the prostitute red light area and comes into the posh area where Simon is and that in itself is a great challenge for her and she begins to weep.

A powerful, powerful picture of someone who weeps with gratitude as she touches the feet of her Savior, of her Lord, she truly knew who he was, what Luther calls most beautifully of her tears, her heart, water.

[17:21] As she wipes his feet with her unbraided hair, only previously unbraided for her clients, now unbraided in order to humbly wipe Jesus' feet in adoration and anoint him with what is clearly costly oil.

Maybe all she had, maybe her pension, maybe her future, she breaks the narrow stem of the jar and anoints Jesus as a sign of her love and her adoration and her worship of him.

How utterly and completely different from Simon, isn't it? In his cold, austere and spineless kind of behaviour, here is one who extravagantly reveals that she understands the code of the gospel for whom much is forgiven.

And it is much love. He has been forgiven little loves, little. There's the woman, beautiful picture, takes us out of our comfort zones, removes us spiritually from the comfort and the order of our pews and of our niceness and of our ordinariness and takes us into a different place.

We tell and we learn from Jesus himself, don't we, in his response to her. Jesus, what did he do? Well, he accepted her worship. Have we ever thought about that?

[18:59] He wasn't embarrassed by, we would have been probably, but she wasn't, sorry, he wasn't, he accepted her worship. He recognises that this is an act of extravagant love for someone whose life has been transformed by him.

Not only is he not embarrassed by it, he draws attention to it. He speaks to it. He speaks to Simon who said, you know, Simon, do you see this woman? Look, Simon.

Look, Simon. I'm the teacher here and I'm saying, look, Simon. Look at her. You've used your own life and your own example and you've been happy with that and that.

You see, look at this prostitute whose life has been transformed by me, whose life has been changed. Look at her because she understands the gospel better than you do.

How appalled Simon must have been, how embarrassed in his own home. Just as Jesus had words to say to Simon, he also spoke to this woman, words of assurance.

[20:09] You know, different kinds of words, wasn't it, to the words that he spoke to Simon? He assured her that what she had already experienced was genuine.

He gave her words of assurance. The two things, a hopeless, helpless, despised prostitute needed to know most. Jesus spoke to her and said, you're forgiven, you have peace.

These are the things that she wanted to hear from Jesus. It's what she craved most. Forgiveness because she felt dirty and unclean.

And peace because no one could buy that for her or give her it. And that is what she looked for. Your faith has saved you. He said, go in peace. God's shalom.

God's blessing. How could I prostitute? No, God's blessing. Go in peace. Jesus says, your sins are forgiven.

[21:14] These words of assurance carry with them also words of authority, don't they? Who is this, they say, that even forgives sins? Jesus is saying something remarkable.

Have we lost sight of that? That Jesus here says, your sins are forgiven. Not because he was sinned against as another human being, but as God. He has also not only the authority to forgive sins, but there's the recognition that primarily our sins that we commit are against Him. Against you, you only have a sin, said David. In other words, Jesus says to her, when he says your faith has saved you, he says, your trust, your humble trust in me as your Lord and Savior through faith is your hope.

Prefigures Ephesians 2 verse 5, it is by grace that we are saved through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God so that no one can boast. No one can boast and there was Simon who lived his life boasting that he was worthy.

What a gift, she had received such a gift. There are great lessons there for us. Can we bow our heads briefly in prayer before we apply this to our hearts and lives? Lord God, we ask and pray that we would focus on and understand what Jesus is saying, not as a pretty story and a pleasant revelation of how he lived and what he did, but maybe take your living word and draw it into our own hearts and into our own experience, and maybe listen for what you have to say through your spirit.

[22 : 54] Maybe hear what we need to hear as we take this beautifully unfolding story with all its levels and take it to our own hearts.

Don't let us leave you at the door, keep us from leaving you outside of our own hearts and experience, but maybe personally, as if there is nobody else here, hear what God has to say and is saying in his living word to us.

Amen. So can I conclude by looking at Jesus and me, if you look at Jesus and Simon and Jesus and a woman, we must take his word and we must see and recognize Jesus and me and what he says to us.

Well surely we can recognize whoever we are that here is the Christ who cares, doesn't he? We have two extreme characters, a religious leader who reckons he is worthy and righteous and a prostitute, a sinner, and yet Jesus shows care and interest in both of these characters.

Do we understand that? Both whoever you are today, that Jesus is interested indeed loves you and has a message of grace and forgiveness for you, that, you know, we can't say Jesus doesn't care, he isn't interested in my type of person, he is.

[24 : 23] This clearly makes that evident and the message is for us all. But it also reminds us as Christians that our attitude to other people must reflect Jesus' attitude.

We must look at people and say, ah, they are self-righteous, legalistic, bigot, they'll never accept me. My friendship with the Gospel, I'm going to ignore them. Or, you know, say, people, ah, well, they'll never come to faith, they have no idea of the Gospel, they're living immoral lives, they're not interested.

We mustn't have that attitude, but Jesus has loved and cared for everyone that he came into contact with and he places you in that same place with lots of different people and he wants you to love them and to share your faith with them.

Because we focus on Jesus himself as well here and we need to watch his style as Christians, don't we? He accepts Simon's invitation, enters into a place of kind of vulnerability in many ways and he knows what to say in the right situations.

Have you found as a Christian that you kind of kick yourself so often because you don't know what to say when the opportunity comes up to share the Gospel? Why, you've missed it. You don't know, you've said the wrong thing or you've spoken inappropriately.

[25 : 45] Well, here's Jesus and he speaks so appropriately to Simon, their insightful words, they expose his heart and they're not kind of patronising. And then he speaks so insightfully and appropriately to the woman who knows, he knows, needed these words of assurance and love.

And he says, you do not have, because you do not ask. And he wants us as Christians to ask for that insight and that wisdom so that when the opportunities come in our lives that we will speak appropriately to people, that we will understand the people who are blind and that God will give us the words to say gently to them and the people who conceive who are maybe broken or vulnerable or lack self-esteem and they will give us the words of encouragement and care for them.

Watching his style, seeing people as people. Simon, do you see this woman? In other words, Simon, you don't see this woman at all, but I see her and I know her and I love her.

Do we see people as people? Do we see them when we criticise them as people? Do we see them when we mock them as people? Do we see their backgrounds? What kind of day they've had? Do we see their family background in their situation?

Do we see what kind of difficulties they've faced? Do we see their hurt and their pain when we criticise, when we condemn, when we turn our back, when we move away from them? In other words, are we living with the eyes of the evangel that Jesus was living with?

[27 : 20] Living with the wisdom of grace that comes from God and the grace of forgiveness that even more so should be in our hearts because of who we are and what we've been forgiven.

Are we watching his style? And are we listening to his voice? Because this is God's word, it remains a living word because he's alive and it's the message he's given us. And are we listening to his voice?

Because his voice will expose us. He says to each of us this morning, as he said to Simon, Simon, I have something to tell you. He says, I know you, you may not think that, but I know you, and I know your heart.

And I know you might not think that you need me. You might not think you're particularly sinful because Simon didn't really think that. But I am telling you that you need me, and I'm telling you that you're a sinner.

And maybe if I expose the way you're treating me, that that will help to explain that. Just as he did with Simon when he said to Simon, look, you didn't give me basic hospitality. You didn't acknowledge me and you didn't show me love.

[28 : 35] Maybe that is where we need to be exposed. If we don't think we're particularly bad or rebellious or sinful, we don't break all the commandments and that kind of stuff, which I'm sure we don't. You don't.

But what place has Jesus got in your heart? What welcome do you give him in your life? What time is there for Christ and for His ways? What lordship does He have? What leadership does He have? What place of honour and glory does He give? Do we give him basic spiritual hospitality, is it where? By giving him that first place in our hearts, because that's what he requires.

And that's what he looks for. Because he has made us, as we sung so gloriously in Psalm 139. And our sin has broken off that recognition. And we've said, we don't need God, we'll go on alone. We'll just live our own way. And he says, no, I love you and I have gone to the cross for you. And you are sitting saying that you're not really that bad.

[29 : 44] What place do I have in your life, in your heart? Is He exposing us today? Do we recognise grace and forgiveness going hand in hand?

He who loves little, see, sorry, He who's been forgiven, little loves little. That's the easiest passage, that's the easiest text in the world to use as a mirror.

To use in our own hearts. How much do we love Jesus while it is revealed by how much we appreciate our forgiveness? And that of course doesn't mean that some of us have very little to be forgiven.

So we're not going to love little, love much. It just means we don't see it. We all have much to be forgiven. If only we will listen for the Christ who reveals that and allow Him to expose our hearts. So He's exposing us at that level, I'm sure, and also challenging us. Challenging us to accept Him as our Lord and Saviour.

[30 : 51] Challenging us to live for Him as our Lord and Saviour. Can I throw out the question because I've had to ask it in my own heart all week. Where is our extravagance?

Where is it? This woman was extravagant in her declaration of love and of gratitude to God. Where is our extravagance gone?

In our worship, in our love for each other, in our love for Christ, in our witness for Christ. Are we all controlled and tamed and managed and we give God just that little measure?

That's enough. No more. I've got the rest of the week for myself. Is it all so just terribly ordinary and plain? And there's no room for extravagance.

There's no room for bubbling over with joy and with grace and with self-defacing love.

[31 : 53] Self-defacing even love for Christ. Self-defacing love for Christ. Does our behaviour, does our life, does our worship reflect the transformation in our heart?

The kind of paradoxes the closer we become to Jesus, the darker our own hearts appear. The more glorious the forgiveness is and the deeper our love becomes.

And that's from Him. And I pray that we will see that and that I will see that. It's easy to see it when we look at God's word, isn't it? And we kick ourselves and say, how have I not seen that before?

Or how have I seen that before and forgotten it so quickly? It seems like there's something at the door of the church which just kind of zaps our memory. It's all taken away.

And we go out the same way as we've gone in. Unmoved and unchanged and untaught. And I'm sure the evil one, it just is just kind of waiting to take away that seed, to take away the word.

[33 : 03] And to take it from our lives. So let us be prayerful and protective of the truth and may we allow His Spirit to transform us through His word, isn't it?

I hope you'll be able to turn tonight. We're looking at holiness and that whole theme of holiness is one that does, can I say, and I'm sure James would reiterate this, tremendously hard to prepare and preach.

Because it's so exposing of our own inabilities and our own unholiness. And yet so fantastically important because it's the place that takes us to a recognition of ourselves and of His forgiveness and of His provision and of His resources to enable us to love Him and serve Him more.

May God bless these thoughts today around His word and may our lives be transformed.