

Guest Preacher - Rev. Donald Morrison

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Preacher: Rev. Donald Morrison

[0 : 0 0] So we turn for a while back to the passage of Scripture we read, and we'll read from verse 44 of chapter 7 in Luke's Gospel.

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.

You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in, she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.

Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much, but he who is forgiven little, loves little. And he said to her, Your sins are forgiven.

Wherever Jesus went, we read in the Gospels, he was dogged by criticism. On one occasion he was surrounded by tax collectors and so-called sinners to hear him because they had a real interest in what Jesus had to say.

[1 : 1 8] They were attracted to him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered against Jesus, giving time and space to these men.

This man welcomes sinners and eats with them. And isn't that good news for you and for me, that this man, Jesus, welcomes sinners and he eats with them.

And we eat with Jesus when we come to the Lord's table. I'm thinking of the passage, I think it's to the church of the Ephesians in a revelation.

If any man hears my voice and opens a door, I will come in and sup with him and he with me. It means that if Jesus is willing to spend time with sinners and to eat with them, then that means that he has a welcome for us, a welcome for you and a welcome for me.

He doesn't just welcome sinners, but he also came into this world to seek them out in order that he might cleanse them and forgive them their many sins.

[2 : 2 5] We read in Luke 19, the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. And we're all lost until we are found by Jesus. And the good news is that he is still, by the Holy Spirit, seeking in different parts of the world in order to save lost sinners such as we are.

Or we might say such as we were until Christ came and laid his hand upon us and brought change into our lives. And this particular passage here, I love this passage of Scripture, it records how a woman came openly and unashamedly and showed her love and her gratitude to Jesus for what he had done for her.

And the Gospels record for as many meetings between Jesus and women, some who were in desperate straits, such as the woman who had suffered bleeding for 12 long years.

And Mark tells us that she had gone to doctors and spent all the money she had, and yet she was not able to find a cure. And Luke himself, who was a doctor, who mentions the same thing.

But of course, Luke doesn't mention any criticism of his fellow physicians. But one day she saw Jesus coming through the street of the community where she lived.

- [3 : 50] And she came up and crept up behind him, thinking to herself that if she just reached out and touched the edge of the robe of this man, Jesus, she would be healed.
- And that's exactly what happened. There was a crowd, there was a press. Yes, Jesus was in the middle of this press, and yet he felt power going out from him.
- And so he stopped and he turned around and he wanted to know, who was it who touched me? And the disciples said, well, look, there's so many people touching you, so many people crowding around.
- And the woman knew that it was she that Jesus was talking about. And so she had to confess. She knelt before him. And Jesus commended her for her faith.
- Go in faith, daughter. You are healed. You are healed. How wonderful it must have been for this woman who could not have gone into a place of worship because she was unclean according to the law of Moses.
- [4 : 50] And yet here she found physical cleansing at the hands of Jesus. She believed that by doing what she did that she would be healed.
- And she was indeed. The Syrophoenician woman whose daughter was tormented by an evil spirit and who came to Jesus and asked that he would drive the spirit out.
- And initially he ignored her because he said he has only come for the people of Israel. But then she said, yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table.
- And so because of those words, he healed her daughter. And then one Sabbath we really healed a woman in the synagogue who had been bound up as a cripple for 18 long years until Jesus came and freed her from her pain and her misery.
- And then there's one of these really tragic bits in Scripture where the synagogue ruler rebuked Jesus and rebuked the woman. There are six days for work, so come and be healed on those days and not on the Sabbath.
- [6 : 02] As if somehow people could come into the synagogue on six days of the week and find healing. But don't, whatever you do, come and seek healing on the Sabbath day.
- A man who had religion, a man who was the religious authority within the community. And yet he had no heart for the pain of the people in that community and especially for this dear woman.
- And we know that the women of that day and of that culture were often treated as second-class citizens. But Jesus gave them respect and he gave them a sense of dignity.
- I sometimes think of the plight of the women in Afghanistan. Women who for a brief interlude years ago had a freedom.
- And now that freedom has been taken away from them. But I believe that in the Lord's providence, as they have been forced back into their homes, after they've been forced out of public life, that they will one day come to see the Lord Jesus Christ.
- [7 : 09] And they would want to turn away from a religion of darkness and come to the one who is the very light of the world. We might think of the Samaritan woman at the well.
- She was surprised that Jesus, a Jew, not only spoke to her, but also asked her for a drink of water. Whereas his disciples had gone off into the town to buy food.
- And they probably would have completely ignored her. And once, while Jesus was preaching, a woman cried out. And in a modern translation, Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you.
- And I love the way it's put in the Old English of the King James Bible. Blessed is the woman that bear thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked.

And the paps which thou hast sucked. And he replied, Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it. And so here in this passage of scripture, we have two very different attitudes presented towards us.

[8 : 14] A man who considered himself to be one of the religious elite. He was certainly not a sinner. And a woman whom Simon certainly did regard as a sinner.

And she was a sinner. We're all sinners. And she knew herself to have been a sinner. But she had been shown forgiveness by Jesus. And as we shall see, it was that that prompted her to take the steps that she did when she came into this home.

A home which, if it were not for the presence of Jesus, she would have been manhandled and thrown out into the streets. Simon the Pharisee looked down upon her.

He would have ostracized her together with his fellow religious Pharisees for her lifestyle. She would have been excluded from the company of respectable churchgoers.

And whatever the problem had been that brought her into the situation that she had found herself in the past, that was of no concern for this man, Simon.

[9 : 22] He had no wish to help her. He had no sense of compassion towards her. Perhaps she had been a prostitute. Perhaps she had been forced into it by financial circumstances and economic hardship, as many are today.

Many people from other parts of the world who have promised all sorts of good things, good jobs with all sorts of things attached. And they're brought into this country and they end up in the sex trade.

Many of them not knowing English, not knowing who to turn to in their plight. But this woman, whatever her background was in Jesus, she found an acceptance and a new beginning.

Her sins forgiven, the slate wiped clean, the shame of her past removed. And this man, Simon, people like Simon might have delighted to remind her of the things that she did in the past and of the lifestyle that she had led.

But not Jesus. In Micah chapter 7, we read there, I will take your sins and hurl them into the depths of the sea.

[10 : 38] And I remember discussing that with the late Professor Donald MacLeod. And he said that having taken the sins of his people, having cast them into the depths of the sea, the Lord put there a boy marked no fishing.

It's as if the sins of the Lord's people had never, ever happened. And in Jeremiah chapter 31, I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.

Wonderful, isn't it? To know that whatever sins we might have committed in the past, no matter how heinous, once we find forgiveness through the Lord Jesus Christ, it's as if they had never happened.

The slate is white clean. We're given a new beginning. And God will never, ever mention them to us. But that's not to say that other people will not point the finger at us.

And surely in this life, finding acceptance with Jesus is the most important thing that could ever happen to us. But his acceptance of somebody does not imply that he would accept or even overlook a sinful lifestyle.

[11 : 48] He does neither. The woman who was caught in adultery and she was brought to Jesus, people said the law of Moses states that this woman should be stoned because of having committed adultery.

It takes two people to commit adultery. There's no mention that a man was brought into the presence of Jesus, just the woman. And Jesus did not condemn her.

He said those famous words, let he who is without sin cast the first stone. And as Jesus bent down and he started sort of writing something in the dust of the ground, they all disappeared until it was just Jesus and the woman, the two of them together.

And she asked him, do you, sir, condemn me also? And he said, no, but go and sin no more. There are people today who think that they can come into the church and find a carry on with their sinful lifestyles and the church will accept them.

But if we want to know Jesus, then we have to live in a way that is pleasing and honoring to the Lord. Be ye holy, even as I am holy, says the Lord.

[13 : 04] And this woman had found acceptance with Jesus. And it was in grateful response to that acceptance that she boldly and bravely entered in to Simon's house to anoint the feet of this man who had demonstrated to her a love such as she had never, ever experienced before.

A love that had lifted the burden of her sin. A love that eventually revealed itself when Jesus would go to the cross to die for her sins as well as yours and mine.

She was shown a love that enabled her to break from her old lifestyle. The debt of her sin had been fully paid and she knew that.

And so she came to show her gratitude to the very one, the Lord Jesus Christ, who had done that for us. And we must not mistake the words of Jesus here.

When Jesus says, she loved much, therefore I tell you her sins which are many are forgiven, for she loved much. Jesus was not forgiving her her sins because he was so impressed by this demonstration of her love and dedication towards him.

[14 : 23] If that was the case, it would go against the whole teaching of Scripture. How many sins have been forgiven? And if we look at the Greek, it speaks of a past action, something that had taken place in the past, perhaps the previous day, perhaps the previous week.

We simply do not know. But when this woman came into the house, she already knew herself to have been cleansed of her sin. And it was because of that she came to demonstrate her love to Jesus.

It could be that the jar of ointment. And in another occasion, we read of a woman who came to Jesus with an alabaster jar of expensive ointment called nard.

And maybe this woman, maybe the ointment she had was similarly expensive. Maybe she was keeping it. That she saw her future financial security in this expensive perfume which she could take and sell.

But now that she had come to know Jesus, she took the most expensive, perhaps, thing that she had, that she owed, and she just tipped it out upon the feet of Jesus.

[15 : 37] She didn't measure it out with a teaspoon or anything like that. She was the recipient of an amazing love, the love of God expressed to us through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so she took the most precious thing she had, and she just tipped it out upon the feet of Jesus. Jesus, during that, on that occasion, he filled her horizon.

It's as if there was nobody else in the room but herself kneeling at the feet of Jesus. She seemed to be oblivious to Simon and his dinner guests, who must have been tutting amongst themselves at this flagrant demonstration of something that they would never themselves abide by.

And sadly, Simon, who was a religious man, he was a Pharisee. He was one of the people whose task it was to uphold the law of Moses amongst the people of Israel.

And sadly, despite his religion, he had no similar love for the Lord Jesus Christ. And we wonder why did he invite Jesus to have dinner with him?

[16 : 51] And maybe it's because, as we were reading earlier on, when Jesus had healed, had brought back to life the young man, the son of the widow of Nain, and people were saying, a great prophet has risen among us, and God has visited his people.

And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country. And obviously, that report had reached the eyes, sorry, had reached the ears of Simon.

And so perhaps he wanted to find out more. He wanted to entertain this great prophet at his own dinner table. Maybe he wanted the applause of having this man coming to his house.

Yes, he had invited him to dinner, but we're not fully sure of what his motives were. But the thing is, as Jesus pointed out to him, he had not shown to Jesus any of the normal courtesies that he would have showed to one of his fellow Pharisees, the courtesies that were customary in the culture in which he lived.

And then when Simon saw Jesus being touched by this woman who had led a sinful life, he thought to himself, surely this man cannot be a great prophet, because if he was, he would not allow himself to be touched by such a woman.

[18 : 19] A great prophet has appeared among us. God has come to help his people, the people we're seeing. This man had religion, and there are lots of people throughout the world who have a religion.

But he knew nothing of God's amazing grace. He knew nothing of the love of God, the love that made God offer up his son on the cross, that we, through believing in him, might not perish but have everlasting life.

And here was a woman saved by grace, a woman loved with an everlasting love, a woman precious in the sight of God. Lots of people would claim to be religious, but what we have when we come to know the Lord Jesus Christ is something far, far better than mere religion.

I remember many years ago when my late wife was converted, and I met a friend of mine in the street, and I wasn't converted at the time.

And my friend, we used to go out to the hills together a lot, and he would blaspheme quite a lot, sort of unconsciously. And I invited him up to the house for a cup of tea, and I said, just watch your language.

[19 : 36] You know, Margaret's become very religious. Well, she had something far better than mere religion. She had entered in, by God's grace, to a relationship of love, knowing Jesus as her Savior and as her Lord.

And if you're a Christian here tonight, then what we have is relationship. We can call God Father. We know Jesus as our elder brother. We are co-heirs with him.

We have a relationship with him that nobody from any other religion in the world has with the so-called God that they worship.

And perhaps this woman, in her former sinful lifestyle, perhaps she had found it hard to look at herself in the mirror. Perhaps she felt shame when she realized the kind of lifestyle that she had been forced into.

But then Jesus came into her life. Jesus cleansed her. Her dignity was restored. No longer a despised sexual object, but loved and approved by God.

[20 : 43] And if Jesus loved and accepted her, then she could hold her head up high in any company whatsoever. She could look the world in the face.

Her heart had been moved on a previous occasion. Perhaps she had been present when Jesus was preaching. Perhaps she was on the mountainside when Jesus was the great sermon on the mount.

We do not know, but we know that this woman's heart had been moved. She had come to see Jesus as her saviour, as her lord, as the one who had brought change into her life.

She had been healed. She had been set free from her torment. Whenever the reason, she was constrained to come and do what she did.

And sadly, Simon, this religious man, had no comparable love for Jesus. He did not consider himself a sinner. His religion assured him of God's forgiveness when it came to the end of life's journey.

[21 : 48] He had no need of this prophet or any other prophet. Two different attitudes, two very different attitudes. The one priding himself on his religiosity, his church attendance, his membership, even, was his ticket that would give him entrance into heaven.

And a woman, completely different, saved by grace, devoid of pride, humble in the presence of God, having come to realize that all the religion in the world could not possibly save her, but simply trusting herself to God's mercy.

And the question that Jesus puts to Simon was, which one will thank God more? Which one will love more? And by his correct answer to Jesus' question, Simon was condemning himself, was condemning his own cold-hearted attitude.

And Psalm 138, though the Lord is on high, he looks upon the lowly, but the proud he knows from afar. And here we had a woman who was lowly and a man who was proud.

Her sins were many. Yes, of course they were. But so are ours. And one of the hymns that Calum Ian seems to like in Ferentosh is, it goes, our sins are many, but his grace is more.

[23 : 18] Our sins are many, but his grace is more. And that is very true, isn't it? And it was to pay the price of your sins and my sins that Jesus came from heaven, came into this dark and sin-sick world, and was willing to go to the cross and to lay down his life, taking upon himself our sin.

He who knew no sin became sin for us, that we might enter into the righteousness of God. And when we confess our sins, and then when we seek God's forgiveness, then we find that the debt against us is cancelled, the slate wiped clean, a new beginning in Christ.

And as God's word is read and preached throughout the whole of the world today, I wonder how many people are entering into new life, how many people are being saved, how many people are having the slate wiped clean, and are able to go on their way rejoicing, because in Christ Jesus they have found a wonderful saviour.

And as we look into the mirror of scripture, we might ask ourselves, which of these two very different contrasting attitudes is staring back at us?

Are we like Simon, proud, religious, looking down upon others? Or are we like this dear woman, whose response to Christ's amazing love was to take the most precious thing she had, and to tip it out on his feet?

[24 : 51] But not only to do that, but to uncoil her hair, and to shed tears over his feet, and to wipe his feet with her hair. What would we think today in our society if we saw a woman acting like that?

We would probably be appalled, but here was such a wonderful expression of the love that this woman had for Jesus. She cared nothing what people thought of her.

She was so overcome by the love that Jesus had for her. Her debt was great, but in Jesus it was fully paid. That's what true Christianity is all about.

It's not working to please a demanding God. It's not jumping through the hoops of religious ritual, going here and going there, as if God would be suitably impressed.

She came to the God of all grace, who, as Paul writes, who loved me and gave himself for me. Isn't that a wonderful statement of Paul about God?

[25 : 55] He loved me and gave himself for me. Can you say that this evening of Jesus? He loved me and gave himself for me.

And how wonderful it must have been for this woman to hear the words of Jesus. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.

Well, if this woman already knew her sins to be forgiven, why was it that Jesus said to her, your sins are forgiven? And I think the answer is that Jesus simply wanted to give her the assurance that, yes, your sins are forgiven.

When you leave this house, when you go out of this room, know this. Without a shadow of doubt, your sins are forgiven. I accept you and I know who you are.

And from now on, you will be with me. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace. She had been set free. She had found that peace that passes all understanding.

[26 : 56] And I pray that each and every one of us gathered here today would know that same peace for ourselves. Amen. And may the Lord add his blessing to these thoughts and meditations on his word.

Eternal and ever-blessed Lord, we thank you for the wonder of your grace. We thank you for this wonderful story recorded for us of this woman and what she did all those centuries ago.

And her name will live on into eternity. And we know that she is now in the nearer presence of Jesus, worshipping him and giving thanks for all that he did for her during her time here on earth.

Lord, we thank you for the freedom that is ours to come and meditate upon these things and to openly preach your word. And we pray for our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world who would long to enjoy the freedom that we so often take for granted.

And we pray for them, for our brothers and sisters who suffer simply because they bear the name of Christ and will not bend the knee to a foreign god or a false prophet.

[28 : 15] We thank you, Lord, for your grace. And we pray for our brothers and sisters in northern Nigeria, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where Christians have been coming under increased and sustained attacks.

We pray for Christians in Mozambique. We pray for Christians in the Muslim world who are so often regarded as second-class citizens. Be with your people wherever they are.

Be with Christians in this country, this country as we come to remember, 80 years since the end of the Second World War and the freedom that was won at such great cost by so many is being eroded with people losing their jobs simply because they are being critical of lifestyles that are being promoted and that are in contrast to those lifestyles that we are encouraged to live by in Scripture.

We thank you, Lord, that your truth will prevail. That is absolute truth. And that truth is to be found in the person of Jesus. So, Lord, bless us and continue with us.

Bless every home represented here. Bless the family who are presenting a child to be baptized next Lord's Day. And we pray that that service would bring great blessing to the family, to their friends, and to the congregation.

[29 : 44] So hear and answer our prayers. Take away every sin in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, we conclude by singing from the Scottish Psalter, Psalm 146.

And we sing verses 5 to 10. O happy is that man unblessed whom Jacob's God doth aid, whose hope upon the Lord doth rest, and on his God is stayed, who made the earth and heavens high, who made the swelling deep, and all that is within the same, who truth doth ever keep.

So, Psalm 146 on page 446, singing from verse 5 to the end of the psalm. O happy is that man unblest whom Jacob's God doth aid, whom Jacob's God doth aid, whose hope upon the Lord doth rest, and on his God is stayed, who made the earth and heavens high, who made the swelling deep, who made the swelling deep, and all that is within the same, who truth doth ever keep.

Who righteous judgment executes for those oppressed that be.

Who to the hungry giveth food God sets the prisoners free.

[31 : 41] The Lord doth give the blind their sight, the boweth down doth raise.

The Lord doth dearly love all those that walk in upright ways.

The stranger's shield, the widow's say, the orphan's help is he.

But yet by him the wicked's way turned upside down shall be.

The Lord shall reign forevermore, thy God, O Zion, he.

[32 : 42] Praise to all generations, praise to the Lord give ye. And now may grace, mercy, and peace from Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, rest and remain with you always, now and forever. Amen.