

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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The Great Salvation: Forgiveness

We shall read a few verses of scripture, firstly from Romans 4:7-8. "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin".

Then in Luke 7:36-50. "And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, 'This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.' And Jesus answering said unto him, 'Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee.' And he said, 'Master, say on.' 'There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?' Simon answered and said, 'I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most.' And he said unto him, 'Thou hast rightly judged.' And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, 'Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint; but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.' And he said unto her, 'Thy sins are forgiven.' And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, 'Who is this that forgiveth sins also?' And he said unto the woman, 'Thy faith hath saved thee: go in peace'".

When the apostle Paul in Romans 4 quotes the words of David the Psalmist, he speaks of the happiness of those who know the forgiveness of sins, and who as far as God is concerned, will never be charged with the guilt of what they have done (verses 7 and 8). I suppose that happiness is the thing that we strive for most in our lives. So much of our time and energy is taken up with searching for those things that will give us satisfaction and enjoyment, whether it be in business, the home, family, friends or recreation. Yet nearly always our happiness is short lived. It doesn't last very long, or something goes wrong, or we are disappointed because what we thought could bring happiness, fails to do so. When we take a look around in the world there is so much seeking after happiness, and yet we see also sadness and sorrow and grief. We have to ask the question, "What is the reason for the lack of happiness in our lives? What is the cause of all the sadness, the suffering that illness and disease causes, and the awful end of it all, death, because this is certainly not the way that God created it all?" The answer to this question can be given in one word, SIN.

I believe the basis for true and lasting happiness can only be found in the knowledge of the forgiveness of our sins. God is a God of infinite love and wants to fill our hearts and lives with the joy of relationship with Him. This alone can bring lasting joy and happiness. But He is also a God of holiness and righteousness and He cannot overlook our sins, and treat them as if they did not matter, as so many people do today. God must be righteous in all that He does. If we are to be in a right relationship with Him, then it must be on a righteous basis. Our sins have to be answered for so that He can then forgive them.

The verses that we read from Luke 7 illustrate the wonderful way that God has reached out to us in the person of His beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to bring to us the knowledge of his love. Forgiveness can be obtained from Him because of the work that the Lord Jesus completed on the cross of Calvary, as the apostle Peter tells us in 1 Peter 2:24, "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree". The apostle Paul who in Colossians 1:13-14, writes of "His dear Son: In whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins". Before ever God could forgive any sins, the guilt and the judgment that those sins incurred had to be settled. This was done in the shedding of the blood of the Lord Jesus; He alone could pay the debt that our sins had brought us into before a holy God.

How gracious it was of the Lord Jesus to accept an invitation into the house of a man who only asked Him so that he would be well thought of. He certainly had no respect or love for the person of God's Son, but Jesus went in with him because He knew there would be one there who not only needed Him but loved Him. He had come down from heaven's glory and had become a man so that He might make known to guilty sinners, such as we, the wonderful love

of God. God wants to forgive sinners and bring them back to himself in peace, free from the judgment that our sins demanded.

Simon made a great mistake when he despised the Lord Jesus and spoke to himself about the fact that the woman who had dared to come into his house was a sinner, and that if Jesus were a prophet he would have known it. How far he was from reality. The Lord Jesus knew her every sin. He was soon to bear everyone of them in His body on the cross, because he knew that if she were to bear them, it would involve for her eternal banishment from the presence of God, who loved her.

So He answers Simon's unspoken question. Simon did not consider that the Lord knew what he was thinking, how blind he was! How little did he realise that he was in the presence of One who not only knew all about the woman's sins, but all his own as well. How impossible it is to hide anything from God. He knows everyone of us through and through. Our lives are like an open book before him. In fact he has made a record of everything that we have done in His book which will be opened at the Great White Throne, as Revelation 20:12 tells us, "and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works". Such will be the judgment of those whose sins are not forgiven.

The Lord Jesus tells a story to illustrate the desperate need that we are in. A creditor had two debtors. One owed a great deal to him, five hundred pence, the equivalent of about two years wages of the average man. The other only owed fifty pence. The amount they owed differed a great deal but they were both in exactly the same position, neither of them could pay the debt. I have often wondered whether the woman or Simon was the five hundred pence debtor. I am quite sure that if we were to ask ourselves the question, most of us would say that, "I have never done anything terribly wrong such as murder or stealing. I have lived a fairly respectable life. I do not owe anybody money and I always do the best I can, but I am not perfect, I am only a fifty pence debtor". How poor is our estimation of sin.

So often we forget about pride and covetousness and wanting our own way, and above all else, what about the claims of God? How much of my life has He got? Am I so taken up with what I want that I have left out completely the will of God and His claims on my life? Whether I think I am only a very mild sinner, or whether I have committed the most awful sins possible, makes no difference. Not one of us can pay the debt, or put the matter right. We have nothing to pay with. As far as God is concerned, we are destitute and bankrupt. Our only hope is for mercy. How wonderful it must have been for these two debtors to hear that he "Frankly forgave them both".

He did not say to the fifty pence debtor, "O you do not owe me very much. I will just write it off". Nor did he say to the five hundred pence debtor, "You owe me so much, you will have to try to do something to reduce the amount." No, he freely released them both from their debts. God does not write off any of our debts. He insists that it is paid by someone. Sadly we live in a society where wrongdoers often get off very lightly, and very rarely is there any thought as to putting right the loss or damage done. But God is not like this at all. He must be righteous in everything that He does. So the apostle Paul in Romans 3:23 writes, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God". Paul then writes of how this can be remedied, "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood". The matter of our sins can be put right with God because of the redemption that has been purchased by the blood of Jesus. God is completely satisfied by that payment. The whole debt has been cleared. This is the meaning of propitiation. And so God is completely righteous in forgiving the sins of those who believe in Jesus.

We must also realise that the question which the Lord Jesus put to Simon involved the response to the forgiving creditor from those who were in his debt. A sense of how much we have been forgiven will lead to love for the Lord Jesus, which after all is what is central to Christianity today. How wrong it is for any to profess belief in His name and to having received all the blessings that go with that and yet not have a deep love for, and commitment to, the One who has made it all possible. Even Simon could work this out and give a right answer. But he was very far from appreciating what he was saying. Sadly there are many today who may be able to say a great deal that is correct about the Bible and Christianity, but they do not know and love the Saviour, and so do not personally enjoy God's forgiveness. My dear hearer, how is it with you? Do you know that your sins are forgiven? If so, has the Lord Jesus Christ the most important place in your life? May this be the case more and more with everyone of us.

The Lord Jesus then very pointedly told Simon where he was wrong. His inviting Jesus into his house may have looked very good, but then he did not even give the Lord Jesus what any respected visitor would receive. But the matter was put in such a way as not only not show up what Simon was, but by contrast, how deep and real were the feelings of the sinful woman. How refreshing to the Lord Jesus were the tears of repentance that fell on His unwashed feet! How He understood that all her outward glory, for this is what a woman's hair speaks of in the scriptures, was being willingly yielded to him, and was being used to dry His feet. The oil which Simon should have poured on Jesus' head was replaced by the ointment from the woman's alabaster box. This spoke not only of her respect for the Lord Jesus, but also of how much she loved Him.

We must always remember that our actions spring from our hearts. Proverbs 23:7 says, "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he". Sadly we see around us men and women, and boys and girls, who speak and do dreadful things. This only reveals the sinful state of their hearts. Education, reform and turning over a new leaf, cannot alter this. If there is unjudged and thus unforgiven sin in our hearts, it will be seen in the way we live. This is also true of the believer. When there is a real work of God in our hearts, and in truth we have repented from our sins and turned to the Lord Jesus in real faith, then this will be seen in our actions.

In the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 7:16, the Lord Jesus said "Ye shall know them by their fruits". He spoke of those who made themselves out to be sheep but in fact were wolves, but in Luke 3:8 concerning those who are real, John the Baptist says that they, "bring forth fruits worthy of repentance".

The woman's tears were not just tears of remorse. She was indeed sorry for what she had done. But repentance towards God goes further than this. It judges what has been done as before God and turns away from it. There are several people in the Bible who said, "I have sinned" and were probably sorry for what they had done. But they then carried on in exactly the same way. But David, in Psalm 51:4 says, "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight". We only truly repent of our sins when we see them in relation to God. David says in verse 6, "Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts". God does not just look at our actions, or even what we say, but He sees what is really in our hearts. Nothing can be hid from Him. He demands reality in our lives. Despite the awful things that David had done, adultery, murder and deceit, he could turn in true repentance towards God and say, "Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow" (verse 7). So it can be with everyone of us. No matter how terrible the deeds that we may have done, if there is true repentance towards God, then the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, shed on Calvary, is available to wash away our sins.

The Lord Jesus knew every sin of this woman. He was soon to take up everyone of them and bear them before a holy and righteous God on the cross. But He saw not only her sins. He saw her repentance and deep love for Himself. So, turning away from Simon, He says directly to the woman, "Thy sins are forgiven". How her heart must have leaped for joy when she heard that. It was Jesus himself and not another who said these words to her. Could she ever doubt that He meant what He said? Could there be some dark sins in her life that she may have forgotten and not turned away from? That may have been the case, but He knew every sin and they were all forgiven. So is the forgiveness of sins with us today. It is not our estimation of them that counts. It is not just the sins which I can remember. It is every sin which I have ever committed in the past and may commit in the future. They are all forgiven because of the work and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. The apostle John writing in 1 John 1:7 tells us, "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin".

Those at the meal table with the Lord Jesus asked in astonishment, "Who is this that forgiveth sins also?" They knew that only God could forgive sins. No mere man, whoever or whatever he may be can forgive sins. Only God can do this, because the sins were committed against Him. But they did not understand that God was there! The Word, who according to John 1:1 was God, and in verse 14 of that same chapter, "Was made flesh and dwelt among us", was there as the man Jesus Christ. He had the right and the authority to forgive sins.

In the last verse of our chapter Jesus says to the woman, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace". What had brought her into this place of forgiveness and blessing? Was it her tears, her feelings, her sorrow for what she had done or her gift of ointment? No! All these things showed the reality of the faith which was in her heart. We must all come by that same way of faith, for Romans 10:9-10 tells us, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness: and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

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