

Sermon Series: Forgiveness: A Clean Slate

Sermon Title: The Forgiveness of God

Sermon Text: Luke 7:36-50

Introduction

I recently read of a Spanish father who had become estranged from his son after years of fighting. The son ran away, and the father set out to find him. He searched for months to no avail. Finally, in a last desperate effort to find him, the father put an ad in the Madrid newspaper.

The ad read Dear Paco meet me in front of this newspaper office at noon on Saturday. On Saturday, 800 Paco's showed up, looking for forgiveness and love from their fathers. We live in a world that is starving, and searching for forgiveness. The guilt and shame of past follies and failures serve as a ghost which haunts the lives of millions of people.

We long for forgiveness. We look for forgiveness and we live for forgiveness from an friend, an parent, an spouse, a parishioner, or a priest. The sad tragedy is that the church, the body of Christ, ought to be the first place someone can find forgiveness; but, it is often the last.

Some of the most unforgiving people in the world are those who claim too have been forgiven by God. That is what makes the account of Luke 7 so striking. It is a story that

introduces us to several personalities. There is the Pharisee named Simon that invited Jesus into his home. There is also the unnamed woman, some believe to be Mary Magdalene, whose life was stained and scarred by sin.

We also meet an unnamed creditor and his two unnamed debtors. Then, there is the most important One in the story, the Lord Jesus Himself. The focus of the story is that of forgiveness.

Thus, for the next 3 weeks I want us to focus on the forgiveness as described in Luke 7. I want us to look at forgiveness from three perspectives. The first involves the forgiveness of God. There is the woman who is called a “sinner.” The words of Jesus to her in verse 48, “Thy sins are forgiven,” remind us how one can be forgiven by God.

The next involves the forgiveness of self. The Lord’s words to this “sinner” in verse 50, “go in peace,” remind us that not only can we be forgiven of God, but we can forgive ourselves as well. Many an unnecessary load of guilt is being carried by those who have heard the Lord say, “Thy sins are forgiven.”

The last involves our forgiveness of others. In the story, Jesus tells of the creditor and his two debtors, who each had their own debt but we read in verse 42 that he frankly forgave

them both. In his act of forgiveness we are reminded of the matter of forgiving others. So we see in the story we see the matter of being forgiven by God, forgiving ourselves, and forgiving others.

We are given three different perspectives on the subject of forgiveness and the freedom of forgiveness in each situation. Let's begin by first considering the forgiveness of God.

First, let's think about:

I. **Forgiveness Appropriated**

What a joy to know that our sins have been, are being, and will be forgiven! The Psalmist said in Psalm 32:1: blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven. Paul echoed those same words in Romans 4:8, "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." Both were speaking of the happiness and joy of knowing their sins had been forgiven.

G.K. Chesterton said, "God paints in many colors, but He never paints so gorgeously as when He paints in white." God said in Isaiah 1:18, "...though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."

God has taken many a dirty heart, and with the blood of the Lord Jesus, painted it whiter than snow. He did it with my heart, and I trust He has done it with their heart. What a joy

is the experience of appropriating the forgiveness of God in our lives. In Luke 7 we see a woman that appropriated God's forgiveness. Let's learn from her a couple of truths about being forgiven of God. First, in her we see:

A. **The Necessity of Forgiveness**

The woman in the story is described in verse 37 as, "a woman in the city, which was a sinner." The Pharisee also said of her in verse 39, "she is a sinner." Jesus Himself spoke of her in verse 47, "Her sins, which are many."

The words, "in the city" are not used to describe her location, but her reputation. All throughout the city she was known for the life she had lived. It's safe to say that, from a sin standpoint, her reputation preceded her.

The Pharisee knew of her reputation, which is why he said, referring to Jesus, in verse 39, "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."

Jesus knew that she was a sinner, and he knew that everyone else knew that she was an sinner. Most feel that Luke's description indicates she was a prostitute. Whatever the case may be, one thing we know, she was a sinner, guilty of "many" sins, who possessed a

horrible reputation. Yet, the Bible gives the same description for us. The Bible says in Romans 3:23, “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. We all, no matter who we are, are sinners. 1 John 4: 8 says, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us...”

James Montgomery Boice compares our good works to Monopoly money. As long as you are only playing Monopoly, those blue 50's and yellow 100's have tremendous value but in the real world, Monopoly money is absolutely worthless. Monopoly money won't pay your mortgage, power bill, or cable bill.

In the same way, Isaiah 64:6 compares our good deeds to filthy rags. In the sight of God, our best works are like menstrual rags. In God's economy, our good deeds are like Monopoly money; they're absolutely worthless.

Someone might say, “There's no doubt that I am a sinner. I've got the scars, the needle marks and the ruined life to prove it.” Someone else might say, “But I have never really done any bad things. I'm not that bad of a person.”

Regardless of the fact if you lived a moral life, or a messed-up life, WE ARE ALL SINNERS! You see a person doesn't have to do anything to be a sinner, except to be

born. We are sinners by birth. David declared in Psalm 51:5, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.” Thus, we are not sinners by our behavior; we are sinners by our birth. And, because we are born as sinners, we then choose to behave like sinners.

We are not sinners because we sin but, WE SIN BECAUSE WE ARE SINNERS! No one is excluded, and everyone is included. Again, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. It’s amazing to me that we live in a day where man seeks to call himself, and his sin everything but what it is.

We have found all sorts of justification, explanation and rationalization for what God simply calls ‘sin.’

Man calls it an accident, God calls it an ABOMINATION

Man calls it a chance, God calls it a CHOICE

Man calls it a defect, God calls it a DEPRAVITY

Man calls it an error, God calls it an ENMITY

Man calls it a fascination, God calls it a FATALITY

Man calls it a luxury, God calls it a LEPROSY

Man calls it a mistake, God calls it a MADNESS

Man calls it a trifle, God calls it a TRAGEDY

Man calls it a weakness, God calls it a WILLFULNESS

Call it what you will, but it doesn't change the fact that God calls it sin! Thus, herein lays the necessity for God's forgiveness. Since we all have sinned, and we are all sinners, we all need forgiveness. We are all sinners and we're all debtors. Thus, God's forgiveness is a necessity. Next, I want you to notice:

B) The Simplicity of Forgiveness

Here is a woman whose life was perverted, polluted, scarred and stained by sin.

Everyone "in the city" knew who she was, and what she had done. Even the Pharisee sought to condemn Jesus for not knowing "who and what manner of woman this was that toucheth him: for she is a sinner."

But, in verse 48 we hear Jesus say to this defiled, destitute and depraved, "Thy sins are forgiven." As far as Jesus was concerned, forgiveness was just that simple. To a sinful woman, forgiveness was a matter necessity; but, to a supreme Savior, forgiveness was a matter of simplicity. He simply says, "Thy sins are forgiven."

There are those today that say we shouldn't magnify sin, because it is offensive to people. But, ladies and gentlemen to minimize sin is to minimize forgiveness. If we were not filthy, then we can't be made clean. Without sin there could be no forgiveness; and, without forgiveness there would be no sin.

Look at that one simple statement, thy sins are forgiven, reveals 2 glorious things. First, it shows that there's no person God won't forgive. This woman was a filthy, vile, wretched, depraved "sinner." Again, most indications are that she was a harlot, or a prostitute.

Furthermore, everyone in the city knew of her life, as well as her lifestyle. She could go nowhere without being recognized as a tarnished piece of work. She was a dirty, defiled, despicable, and detestable sinner. Even Jesus acknowledged her "many" sins. Yet, He ever so sweetly, and simply says, "Thy sins are forgiven."

I'm sure that most everyone will recognize the name David Berkowitz, better known as the "Son of Sam." In 1977, he went on a year-long killing spree that left six people dead and eight wounded. He later told Police that he was driven to commit murder by a 6,000 year-old demon whose voice he heard through his neighbor's dog, Sam.

He was sentenced to multiple life terms in 1978. In 1987, after ten years in prison, one night while walking alone in the prison yard, he was contemplating ending his life.

Another prisoner, Ricky Lopez, introduced himself and began talking to him about God's love and how He could forgive him of his sin.

He gave Berkowitz a Bible. Although Jewish, Berkowitz began reading the Bible and one night while reading his Bible, he fell on his knees and cried out to God for mercy and he wrote, "When I finished talking to God, I got up. My mind seemed to flood with a sense of peace.

I knew from that moment that Jesus Christ heard me. I sensed in my heart that I was forgiven and that I was now free." Since March 24, 1997, he has worked in the prison chaplain's office at the Sullivan Correctional Facility in Fallsburg, N.Y. and has started a ministry in the prison block set aside for prisoners with mental and emotional problems. He stated that his driving ambition was share the forgiveness he received with others.

I would say to you that if God can forgive a harlot, and if God can forgive the "Son of Sam," then there is no person God won't forgive. Whether your sins are large, or little, your life is moral or a mess, God can and will forgive you of every single sin. But, not only is there no person God won't forgive; there is no past God can't forgive. Look again

at that statement, “Thy sins are forgiven.” What did Jesus mean when He said her sins were forgiven? The word “forgiven” literally means, “To send away.” To a woman who was a “sinner,” a prostitute, one who had committed “many” sins, Jesus says, “Thy sins are sent away.” Who she was, and what she had done had all been taken away.

Is that not what John the Baptist declared when he saw Jesus, “Behold the Lamb of God, Which taketh away the sin of the world?” When God forgives us, He takes away our sins. That is what it means to be forgiven. You may ask; “If God sends them away, where does He send them? “If God takes them away, where does He take them?”

The Bible tells us in Psalm 103:12, “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.” He has removed them from us in such an immeasurable distance we will never face them again.

The Bible tells us in Isaiah 38:17, “...Thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back.” When He forgives us of our sins, He no longer sees our sin. The Bible says in Micah 7:19, ‘He will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.’”

Corrie ten Boom said, “When I bring my sins to the Lord Jesus, He casts them into the depths of the sea—forgiven and forgotten. He also puts up a sign, No Fishing Allowed!”

God said in Isaiah 44:22, I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins. My personal favorite is found in Colossians 2:14. Paul describes our sin as a “handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us.”

The “handwriting of ordinance” was a legal note for payment. Today, we would call it an IOU. In other words, because of our sin, the law demanded payment, penalty, and punishment. The law of God numbered our sins. The law of God listed our sins.

The law of God revealed our sins. The law of God demanded payment. The law of God cried out the verdict, “Guilty! Guilty!” The law of God declared that we pay the price but look at what Jesus did with our sin IOU.

Paul says that, He “took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.” In other words, our sin debt has been cancelled. We owed a debt we could not pay; but, Jesus paid the debt He did not owe, and gave us a legal discharge.

By a bloody cross and an empty tomb, Jesus did not cover our sin, but He **CLEANSED** our sin. He removed them, He took them away, and He sent them away. We all have sinned, but blessed be God we all have a Saviour that forgives of sin!

The great British preacher, Brownlow North went to preach at one of the largest churches in London. As he greeted people, someone handed him a note and walked on. He slipped the note into his pocket and went on into the sanctuary.

Before he got up to preach, he took out the note and read it. The note listed dates, places, things, and sins that Brownlow had committed in his past life. At the bottom of the note were words that read, “Now, I dare you to stand up and preach after you are guilty of all these things.”

Brownlow North stepped into the pulpit and shared the note with the congregation. He read every date, everything, every place, and every sin that was listed. He said, I confess that everything in this note is true.

I must also confess that there are things I have done that are not included in this note. But, my friend has overlooked one thing, ‘The blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, hath cleansed me of all my sin.’”

He has removed them as far as East is from West; He has blotted them out as a thick transgression; He has cast them into the depths of the sea never to be remembered anymore. It matters not who you are, or what you have done, listen to what the Bible

says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Jesus says to you, as He did to this harlot, "Thy sins are forgiven." You say, "Pastor, I don't understand it." I say, "Great!

Don't try to understand it, just STAND ON IT!" By faith accept the fact that if you ask Him, it's not a case where God might forgive you, or could forgive you. It's a case where God can forgive you and will forgive you.

You could list any sin you like, abortion, adultery, murder, homosexuality, pornography, or any other sin. But, at the cross, Jesus "took it out of the way." He will forgive of any sin; and, I repeat, ANY sin!

We are sinners who deserve to be in hell, upside-down with our backs broke; but, God looks to a bloody cross and an empty tomb and says, thy sins are forgiven! Hallelujah! There is no person God won't forgive, and there is no past God can't forgive.

If you need forgiveness today, reach out and take it, because it's already there. It's been bought and paid for by a blood Cross, an empty tomb, and a glorified Savior. All you have to do is appropriate it.

II. **Forgiveness Appreciated**

Whenever I think of the woman in this story, I can't help but believe that the words of Romans 5: 20 are applicable to her. "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" Her sins were "many," yet she was forgiven. Great may have been her sin, but far greater was God's forgiveness.

All Simon, the Pharisee, could notice was the sinfulness of the woman. However, what he should have noticed was the sinlessness of the Lord Jesus. If Simon recognized that she was a "sinner," what would that say of him, a hypocritical Pharisee?

This "sinner" woman, guilty of "many" sins is a testimony to the glorious truth that no one has gone so far that grace can't reach them; and, that no matter how far one goes in sin, God's forgiveness is available.

As a result of the forgiveness she appropriated, we see the forgiveness she appreciated. One of the most beautiful scenes in the Bible involves this forgiven "sinner" expressing her gratitude to the One who had forgiven her.

We read in verses 37-39 that, she "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.” There are several things, on the part of the woman, which testify of her appreciation for God’s forgiveness. For one thing, notice:

A) **Her Love Depicted It**

Everything about her actions depicted the deep, definite and devoted love she had for Jesus. In fact, Jesus says to Simon in verses 44-46, “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...”

In Mark’s he says that the ointment was worth more than three hundred pence. That was a monetary value equaled to a year’s worth of wages but, apparently the love that flooded her soul gave no regard to cost, because Mark says that she “brake the box, and poured it on his head.”

In other words, she could not place a monetary value on the forgiveness she had received, free of charge. Thus, from the moment Jesus entered into Simon’s house, we read that she never “ceased” to “kiss” the feet of her Savior. The word “ceased” is a medical term used

to speak of a remittent fever. In other words, her love for the Master was at a fever pitch.

Furthermore, the tense of the verb is in the continuous mood. It indicates that this was not a sporadic act, but a continual process, over and over again.

From the very moment Jesus entered the house, she wept, she washed, she wiped, she warmed, and she worshipped the One who had forgiven her “many” sins. What would possess her to behave in such a way? Nothing else but a fever pitched love for Jesus.

Isn't it amazing that the longer we are saved, the more often our love for Jesus grows cold? Yet, should not it be just the opposite. Should not it be that the longer we are saved, our love for Jesus is fuller, deeper and richer after many years of fellowship with Him?

It would stand to reason that the longer we are saved, and the more we come to know about the price Jesus paid for our sins, the more head-over-heels in love with Him that we would be. But, quite often, it's just the opposite.

This woman did not know of Christ going to the Cross to die for sins. She knew nothing of the riches of divine grace, and the blessings that are ours in Christ; yet, look at how she loves Him! Ought not we, who have been seen a full revelation of God's grace be ten, an hundred, or even a thousand times more burning up with a love fever for Jesus?

Think about it! God not only saved us and forgave us, but He has “blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ. How we, like this woman, ought to appreciate it all the more.

Not only do we see her love that depicted it, but:

B) Her Life Declared It

This uninvited woman slips in and showers Jesus with her tokens of love. One of her acts, that has always blessed my heart, is described by Jesus in verse 44, “she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.”

In 1 Corinthians 11:15, Paul said, “If a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her.” Thus, as this woman takes her “long” hair to wipe the feet of Jesus, it is GLORY TOUCHING GLORY! The “glory” of her hair touched the glory of the feet of the Son of God.

She anointed His feet with the fragrant ointment, or perfume; then, she took it away again as she wiped His feet with her hair. As a result, when she left the house, glory was still in her hair. Jesus and the woman carried the same sweet fragrance wherever they went.

Jesus smelled like the fragrance of the ointment; and, she smelled like the fragrance of Jesus and the fragrance was that of forgiveness. Remember, that everyone “in the city” knew of her past. They knew who she was, and what she used to be before she met Jesus.

But, now, she has been forgiven and as she walks back “in the city,” everyone she passes smells a different fragrance about her. The fragrance of her life declared the fact that she was no longer who she used to be, and what she used to be; but, she had met Jesus, ‘her sins, which were many’ were taken away, and she was forgiven.

Oh, how people ought to smell a different fragrance about those of us who have touched the glory of forgiveness. How our lives ought to declare the fact that we are now longer what we used to be but old things are passed away and all things are become new. Finally we not only see her love that depicted it and her life that declared it, but:

C) **Her Lord Deserved It**

In the ancient Jewish custom, it was common courtesy for one to offer a guest water to wash their feet, hands, and face. It was also the custom that when a guest arrived to greet them with a kiss, welcoming them into their home.

As well, oil or a form of perfume was given for the guest to refresh themselves but when Jesus arrived he reveals in verses 44-46 that none of these were offered by Simon. Yet, this woman slipped in, apparently uninvited, and took upon herself to serve the Lord Jesus with these common courtesies.

From the moment He arrived, she ceased not to serve Him and attend to these courtesies.

Why? Because she knew that her Lord deserved nothing less than her love, her loyalty, and her life. Thus, Jesus says in verse 47, “Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.”

I could stand here and give you many reasons why you ought to love Him and live for Him; but, there is none greater than the fact that He has freely and fully forgiven us of all our sins. What other motivation should we need than the fact that God loved us and Jesus died for us to forgive us?

Did you notice what Jesus said? She was forgiven of “many” sins; as a result, “she loved much.” But, “to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.” Do you understand what Jesus is saying?

He is saying that a person, who appreciates God’s forgiveness, is a person who will love Him “much.” But, someone who “loveth little,” is someone who does not appreciate His forgiveness.

Have you appropriated His forgiveness? Do you appreciate His forgiveness? The proof of it is found in a love that depicts it, a life that declares it, all because of a Lord that

deserves it. In the movie, *The Last Emperor*, the brother of the young emperor of China asks, “What happens when you do wrong?” The boy emperor replies, “When I do wrong, someone else is punished.” Then, to demonstrate his words, he breaks a jar, and orders one of his servants to be beaten.

Yet, what God has done for us is a total reversal of that pattern. As sinners, we have all erred, and “come short” of His standard of perfection. We have all broken the jar of sin; but, God allowed His Son to be beaten for us.

Do you need to appropriate God’s forgiveness? It matters not who you are, or what you have done, He wants to forgive and He will forgive, if you will ask Him. If you have asked Him, then by faith accept it and thank Him for it.

Do you appreciate His forgiveness? If so, no one should ever have to beg you to serve Him, worship Him, and honor Him. If you are truly grateful for the fact that you have been forgiven, the thermometer of your life ought to reveal a burning fever of love for Jesus. Why? Because Thy Sins Have Been Forgiven!!!