

Sermon Series: Forgiveness: The Clean Slate Part 2

Sermon Title: Let It Go

Sermon Text: Luke 7:36-50

Introduction

I read about a New Jersey artist who came up with the idea of selling “guilt kits.” Each kit contained ten disposable paper bags and a set of instructions that read, “Place bag securely over your mouth, take a deep breath and blow the guilt out. Dispose of the bag immediately.”

Amazingly, he sold about 2,500 kits at \$2.50 each, because many people were carrying around a load of guilt, and searching for some way to remove it. The story is told about a prank pulled by the famous playwright Noel Coward.

It is said that he sent an identical note to twenty of the most famous men in London. The note read, “Everybody has found out what you are doing. If I were you I would get out of town.”

Supposedly, all twenty men left town. It would seem that something from their past filled with guilt. According to a 2006 finding, by the New England Journal of Medicine, 70 percent of people in mental institutions could be released if they knew how, and where, to find a way to cope with guilt.

There are times when we feel guilty because we are guilty. Guilt is the result of wrong actions, deeds, or sin in our life. The Holy Spirit speaks up when we have done wrong and loudly reminds us of our sin. Guilt has a way of making us feel guilty.

On the other hand, there are those who are haunted and harassed by unnecessary guilt. As a pastor, I have known those who struggled with their past and had difficulty putting it behind them.

Their past failure dogged their every step. The skeletons in their closet rattled incessantly. Although their sins had confessed to God, and cleansed by God, they still carried a sense of guilt for what they had done.

Someone has said that, “If we don’t deal with our guilt, our guilt will deal with us.”

Experiencing the forgiveness of God, and embracing the forgiveness of self is the only way that we deal with our guilt.

In our last sermon, we looked at the woman found in Luke 7, forgiven of her sin. Jesus said to her in verse 48, “Thy sins are forgiven.” In this study, I want us to look at her again and notice what Jesus said to her in verse 50, “Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.”

In those words, Jesus was telling her that her past no longer had to hurt her, harm her, hinder her, or haunt her. He was giving her the secret to the forgiveness of self. As I said last week, there are 3 levels of forgiveness described in Luke 7.

There is the forgiveness of God, the forgiveness of self, and the forgiveness of others. It all starts with the forgiveness of God. But, once I come to grips with the fact that God has forgiven me, I am then able to forgive myself, as well as others.

Let me put it this way. God forgives me; that is Grace. I forgive me; that is Peace. I forgive you; that is Fellowship and that is the ultimate freedom of forgiveness. Let's notice how the words of Jesus to this sinful woman enabled her to experience the forgiveness of self. First of all, in order to forgive ourselves, we must:

I. Live Free From Contemplation

The woman in the story, many believe to be Mary Magdalene, has just experienced the forgiving grace of the Lord Jesus. In spite of who she was, and what she had done, Jesus says to Simon in verse 47, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven."

Apparently, Simon had a Pharisee dinner party, because in verse 49, “they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, who is this that forgiveth sins also?” Their question was in response to what they had just heard Jesus say to them, and to the woman.

In verse 48, Jesus says to the woman, “Thy sins are forgiven.” In His own words, Jesus was declaring that He was the One who “forgiveth sins also.” In other words, He was the One, and the Only One who could send away, and take away the sins of this woman.

Yet, He is the Only One qualified to “seek and to save that which was lost.” He is the Only One qualified to “save his people from their sins.” The sins of this woman were many, but the Savior of the woman was mighty, the Lord Jesus Himself.

Thus, the woman teaches us that the first step in forgiving self is to live free through the contemplation of the fact that Jesus has forgiven us. For one thing:

A. He Looks To Find Sinners

In verse 34, before Jesus entered the house of Simon, this was the resume given to him by the Pharisees; “The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.”

After He entered the house of Simon, in verse 37, “a woman in the city, which was a sinner,” slipped in and lavished him with love. Simon the Pharisee said within himself, 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.”

In other words, the Pharisees accused Jesus of being a friend of sinners, and in our story Jesus demonstrated that He was guilty. I don't know about you, but I'm awfully glad that Jesus is a friend of sinners.

Sinners of every color, class, code and creed have found that Jesus is a friend of sinners. The Pharisees thought they were criticizing Jesus by saying that He was a “friend of publicans of sinners.”

But, the truth of the matter is that what they thought was criticism, turned out to be the greatest compliment one could give Him. He is a friend of sinner. He is a friend to THIS sinner, and He's a friend to every sinner.

Max I. Reich told of a passing a repair shop and seeing a sign in the window, "We mend everything except broken heart." When he asked what they did with broken hearts they replied, "We send them to the hospital."

I'm glad to report to you that a person doesn't have to go to the hospital to find Doctor Jesus, because He still makes house calls. There is no patient He will not see, there is no pain He does not subside, and there is no problem He cannot solve. He will take you, with, or without insurance.

Jesus doesn't wait on sinners to come looking for Him, because He goes out looking for sinners. I well remember the day He came looking for me, and He found me where I was, for what I was, and who I was to say, "Thy sins are forgiven." The reason He looks to find sinners is because:

B. He Loves To Forgive Sinners

The woman in this story, in no uncertain terms, was a "sinner." In fact, twice, in verse 37 and verse 39, she is referred to as a "sinner." In verse 37, we're told that everyone "in the city" knew she was a sinner.

In other words, her reputation as a dirty, defiled and depraved sinner preceded her. She was known by her life, as well as her lifestyle. It was a not a secret to anyone, because

Simon knew she was a sinner, Jesus knew she was a sinner, everyone “in the city” knew she was a sinner; and, she knew she was a sinner. Again 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. But, it was to a despicable and detestable sinner, Jesus says in verse 49, “Thy sins are forgiven.”

She serves as a wonderful reminder that the worst of sinners can be, and will be forgiven by God. He looks to find sinners, and He loves to forgive sinners and the word “forgive” literally means, “To send away.”

In other words, when we came to Jesus, He sent away and took away every sin we ever committed. Paul said in Colossians 2: 14, “He took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.” Who I was, what I was, where I was, when I came to Jesus, was ALL taken and sent away, never to be remembered anymore.

I love the story of William Cowper. Cowper suffered from severe bouts of depression, and thinking that life wasn’t worth living, attempted to take his life on three different occasions. However, each time he tried to kill himself, something always happened to

prevent it. After his last attempt, he thought to himself, “I am such a failure. I can’t even succeed in killing myself.” He was walking by a mission while a service was in progress. He heard the singing and rejoicing inside and stopped just outside the door to listen.

It was then that he heard a man get up and tell that God loves us so much that He sent Jesus to die for us. That night, William Cowper gave his heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ. In later years, a man who wanted to bleed to death wrote the words:

There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel’s veins;
And sinners plunge beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.

Aren’t you glad that Jesus looks to find sinners? Aren’t you glad that Jesus loves to forgive sinners? Then, live free through the contemplation of the fact that, if you are saved, you have been forgiven!

II. **Live Far From Condemnation**

If you are saved, then you are forgiven! If you have sinned, and you have confessed it to God, then you are forgiven. It's just that simple. In our story, a woman whose life was stained and scarred by sin heard Jesus say, "Thy sins are forgiven." Yet, we do not read where she dismissed His words, debated His words, or doubted His words.

Can you imagine what those words, "Thy sins are forgiven," meant to this sinful woman? I'm sure that it would have been easy for her to go through life carrying around a load of guilt, and shame for what she had done, and how she had lived.

Yet, Jesus says to her, "Thy sins, all thy sinful practices and sinful past, are taken away." Thus, we see that once we live free through contemplation of forgiven sins, we must then make a choice to live far from condemnation of former sins. The reason it is necessary to live far from condemnation is because many are:

A. Chained To A Sinful Past

I'm quite confident that had this woman chose to, she could have, and would have lived chained to her sinful past. Again, everyone "in the city" knew of her sinful life, as well as her sensual lifestyle. Everyone knew who she was, and what she had done. I'm also sure that after she heard Jesus say, "Thy sins are forgiven," that she may have ran into

some one on her way home that would have reminded her of her sins. If she had not accepted the free and full forgiveness of the Lord Jesus, she would have lived like a slave chained to her sinful past.

For many a defeated soul, the ghosts of guilt and the pain of the past is like a hound on their trail. The bones of the skeletons in their closet never seem to quit rattling. It was Shakespeare who wrote of how a guilty person is “full of scorpions.”

Like Lady Macbeth, who looked at her lily-white hands, but saw blood after taking part in a murder, the ghosts of ones past seemingly never leaves them alone. They have heard Jesus say, “Thy sins are forgiven,” but they continue to live in shackles chained to a past abortion, a past illegitimate pregnancy, a past moral, mental or marital failure.

They know the Bible says, if they confess their sin God is faithful and just to forgive their sin, but they just can't forgive themselves, because something in their past holds them, haunts them and harasses them. Not only are many chained to a sinful past, but they are:

B. Cheated By A Satanic Power

In our story, Simon, though a Pharisee, in reality played the part of the devil's advocate. He knew who this woman was, and what this woman had done; thus, he reminds her, as well as Jesus by saying, 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 has just been invited to Simon's house, and he is warmed, welcomed, and worshipped by an uninvited "sinner" woman. Immediately, Simon loads his gun with attack and accusation against this woman, because all he chose to see was her dirty, defiled and depraved past.

Doesn't that sound just like the devil? Revelation 12:10 informs us that Satan is the "accuser of the brethren." The word "accuser" is a Greek word from which we receive the word "category."

In other words, the devil is constantly on the look out to categorize our sin. How does he do that? He does that by being the one that accused them before our God day and night. He does that by reminding us, as well as God, of who we are, and what we have done.

Many Christians ought to wise up to the fact that the devil is the ultimate con man. He will bait the hook with bait that allures and attracts us. Once we take the bait, and fall

into sin; he turns the tables and says things like, “You are no good. You are unworthy. If you were really saved, you never would have done that.” Isn’t that amazing? The very one who set a trap for us to fall into, has the audacity to accuse us once we’ve fallen.

It reminds me of a little boy who always went next door to play, even though his mom had warned him against doing so. This worried his mom so badly that she asked him why he was so disobedient.

He replied that Satan tempted him so bad that he did not know what to do. His mom then advised him to say, 'Get thee behind me Satan,' whenever he was tempted. She then built a fence around the house.

This worked for a week, then one sunny afternoon his mom looked out the window and there was her son playing on the neighbor’s lawn having cut a hole in the fence. She yelled, "Jeremiah, come here!

Did I not tell you to say 'Get thee behind me Satan' whenever he tempted you to go thru the fence?" The boy replied, "Yes mom. I said 'Get thee behind me Satan,' then he went behind me and pushed me through the hole in the fence.”

Friend, be not deceived to think that the devil has your best interests at heart. If you are unsaved, he hates you and will not be satisfied until he devours your life. If you are saved he really hates you, and will not be satisfied until he destroys your testimony. That's why the Bible likens Satan to 5 different animals.

In Genesis 3, he's a serpent trying to deceive God's people.

In Matthew 13, he's a bird trying to despoil God's harvest.

In John 10, he's a wolf wanting to dismantle God's flock.

In 1 Peter 5, he's a lion trying to devour God's children.

In Revelation 12, he's a dragon wanting to destroy God's Son.

But, if you are saved, and have committed some sin and that sin has been confessed to God; as far as God is concerned it is forgiven and forgotten. You see the Holy Spirit convicts us, but the devil condemns us.

If that sin has been confessed, the Holy Spirit will never bring it up again because it is under the blood, cast into the "depths of the sea." But, the devil will bring it up, over and over again, to condemn you.

That's why I love Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." It doesn't matter what sin you committed, if you ask God to forgive you, it is forgiven.

Therefore, you don't have to live chained to a sinful past or cheated by a satanic power. You can live far, far away from condemnation. Finally, to forgive ourselves we should live free through contemplation, live far from condemnation; and:

II. Live Full Of Consolation

I call your attention to the words of the Lord Jesus in verse 50. He has just informed her that "Her sins, which are many...are forgiven." but, then, He proceeds to say to her, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."

He could have said, "Thy sins are forgiven, now get away from me." Or, "Thy sins are forgiven, don't ask me again. Or, Thy sins are forgiven; get out of town so no one sees you. But, instead, He says, Thy sins are forgiven. Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.

What a word of consolation those words must have been. She may have expected condemnation, but instead she received consolation. She did not have to live in bondage

to who she was, and what she had done. She did not have to hang her head, in guilt and shame, once Jesus had forgiven her. Rather, her pitiful life became a peaceful life full of consolation. For one reason, she could:

A. Affirm It As Fact

To a woman whose life was stained and scarred by sin, Jesus says, go in peace. The word peace speaks of being quiet in yourself. The idea is of a person having restfulness and peacefulness about them.

In other words, once she had been forgiven by Jesus, it didn't matter what anyone else thought, including herself. She had been freely and fully forgiven by the only One that matters; thus, she could affirm it as fact. She was forgiven.

It reminds me of the words of the Lord Jesus to a woman caught in the act of adultery in John 8. I'm convinced that the man she committed the act with was among those seeking to condemn the woman.

First, the Pharisees knew that the law demanding that she be stoned. Second, whatever Jesus wrote on the ground “they heard it, being convicted by their own conscience.” As a result, they scattered like scalded dogs.

Jesus looked up and said, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee?

She said, “No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, neither do I condemn thee: GO AND SIN NO MORE!”

Without condoning her or condemning her, He cleaned her, comforted her and consoled her. His words to her, go and sin no more not only spoke of forgiveness, but repentance. But, as far as He was concerned, forgiveness was a fact she could affirm.

Isaiah declares in Isaiah 53:6 that when Jesus died on the Cross, “the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” In other words, Jesus became “sin for us.” He became sin without becoming a sinner.

Get the picture. Jesus, on the Cross, became sin. But, Paul said again, regarding our sin debt, that Jesus “took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.” Thus, as they drove the spikes into his hands and feet, they were in essence nailing our sin to the Cross.

Therefore, it matters not what may be the skeleton that is rattling in your closet, or what past sin holds you, haunts you, or harasses you. Jesus became that sin, and He “took it out of the way.” The debt has been paid in full, and it was paid “once and for all.”

It’s just that simple, so affirm it as fact. We did not demand it, we did not desire it; and, we certainly did not deserve it; but JESUS DID IT! You want to learn to forgive yourself, and then affirm that Jesus shed His blood not so you could live with guilt; but, so that you would live in grace. Not only must we affirm it as fact, but we must:

B. Accept It By Faith

Jesus said to this defiled, despicable and depraved sinner, thy sins are forgiven. Then, thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace. As far as Jesus was concerned, her sins were both forgiven and forgotten. Her “sins, which were many,” had all been taken away.

As a result of His forgiveness, His advice to her is, “Don’t hang you head. Don’t wallow in it. Don’t dwell on it. Rather, go in peace, and be at rest in yourself that you have been forgiven.”

How could she understand that? The answer is, she couldn't. All she could do is take the Lord Jesus as His word, affirm it as fact, and accept it by faith. Yet, such is the case for any person who seeks to be delivered from the shame and guilt of past sins that haunt, and harass them.

If it has been confessed, and repented of, as far as Jesus is concerned, it has been forgiven and forgotten. It's not based upon your understanding of it, because, in all likelihood, you will never understand how God could be so loving to forgive and forget.

Thus, instead of understanding it, affirm it as fact and accept it by faith. I have met, dealt with, and counseled all sorts of people down through the years. There are those people with the attitude, "Well, I know I shouldn't do this, but the Lord will forgive me of it."

If that is a person's attitude toward the grace of God, then they know nothing of the grace of God. Grace does not give a license to sin, but a liberty to serve. There are other who constantly hear the rattling of skeletons in their closet.

I ask them, "Have you confessed it to God, and repented of it?" They often say, "Pastor, I've asked God to forgive me a thousand times over." To which I reply, "If you meant business; only 1 time was required."

Then, they say something like, “I know that God has forgiven me, but I just can’t forgive myself.” Wait a minute! Do you realize what you are saying? You are saying that, apparently, you have a higher standard than God.

You are saying that Sovereign God can forgive you, but you cannot forgive yourself?

Then, you must have a higher standard of forgiveness than God. We often quote 1 John 1:9 without truly understanding the context of it.

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.” That verse does not just apply to God’s forgiveness at the moment of salvation, because John is writing to those who have already been saved.

That is why he writes in 1 John 2:1, “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

God does wipe the slate clean at the moment of salvation. At that moment, “old things are passed,” and “all things become new.” But, what many fail to see is that God saves our soul, not our flesh. Thus, as long as we inhabit this flesh, we will always possess the

capacity for sin, and the propensity to sin. John writes to say, “Saints, my earnest desire is that you do not sin but, if you do sin, you have the best defense attorney of eternity, Jesus Christ the righteous, who pleads your case before the Father.”

Therefore, although there are always consequences to sin, there is also forgiveness for sin. If you ask Him, confess it to Him, and repent of it, God will forgive you. Once you affirm His forgiveness as fact, and accept His forgiveness by faith; you can then “Go in peace,” and forgive yourself.

I love the life story of Clara Barton, the organizer of the American Red Cross. One of the legacies of her life is that she was such a forgiving person that never harbored resentment toward anyone.

On one occasion, a friend recalled to her an incident that had taken place years before. The friend said, “Don’t you remember the wrong you did?” Clara Barton replied, “No, I distinctly remember forgetting that!”

The devil will bring it up, but God never will. Other people may bring it up, but God never will. Your mind may even bring it up, but God never will. Forgiven sin is forgotten sin. Affirm it as fact and accept it by faith.

There are those in this room today, who need to come to this altar and gain victory once and for all over the past. You need to determine with the apostle Paul, “this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before.”

You need to come humbly before God and say, “Lord, I know that I did wrong. I’m sorry, not because I got caught, but because I broke your heart, and violated your holy standard. Thus, on the authority of Your Word, I ask you to forgive me and cleanse me.”

Then, you need to accept it faith and say, “Thank you, Father that I am clean before you. Thank you that You do not see what I did in my sin, but what Jesus did for my sin. Since you no longer remember my sin, I don’t have to, and I refuse to live in the devil’s basement any longer.

You say that I am forgiven; therefore, I am forgiven, and I forgive myself for what I have done.” When the devil tries to bring it up again, take Him to the Word of God, a bloody cross, an empty tomb, and a glorified Savior who is your F. Lee Bailey before God.

Tell the devil, “God has forgiven and forgotten, and I distinctly remember forgetting it as well.” Then, get up, dust yourself off, and “Go in peace!” Hallelujah!