

Jesus: Friend of Sinners

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[0 : 0 0] For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say he has a demon. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. But wisdom is proved right by all her children.

When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume.

As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and poured perfume on them.

When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, If this man were a prophet, he would know who was touching him and what kind of woman she is, that she is a sinner.

Jesus answered him, Simon, I have something to tell you. Tell me, teacher, he said. Two people owed money to a certain moneylender.

[1 : 1 7] One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both.

Now, which of them will love him more? Simon replied, I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgive him. You have judged correctly, Jesus said.

Then he turned towards the woman and said to Simon, Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.

You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.

Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven, as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little, loves little.

[2 : 2 2] Then Jesus said to her, Your sins are forgiven. The other guests began to say among themselves, Who is this who even forgives sins? Jesus said to the woman, Your faith has saved you.

Go in peace. Amen. Thanks so much. I encourage you to keep that open in your Bibles, because that will be good to keep in front of you as we work through it.

Would you pray with me as we come to meet God in His Word? Heavenly Father, we thank You that You are a God who speaks, and that You haven't left us by ourselves to work out who You are, but You have given us Your Word.

And so, Father, we pray that as we come to Luke 7 this evening, that You would speak to us. Show us Jesus. Would You mould us and shape us to be Your people.

For Christ's glory, we pray. Amen. When Martin invited me to preach tonight, he said, Look, you can talk about anything on mission, on evangelism.

[3 : 36] And so I thought, okay, well, what should we do? Because we could do just about any book when it comes to thinking about mission. The whole story of the Bible is about a God reaching out to a world who has rebelled against Him with a message of hope.

But we're going to look at this little story of Jesus changing a woman's world. Because really, when it comes to your friend, or your sister, or your brother, or your grandfather, or your work colleague, or your daughter, or your teammate, or your classmate, or your whoever, when it comes to people in your life who don't know Jesus, that's what we want, isn't it?

That their world would be changed, that would be turned upside down by Jesus. And if you're here tonight as the friend, or as the family member, and someone has invited you along to church, good on you for coming along.

Your friend is praying that your world will be turned upside down by Jesus. And so good on them for caring for you as well. It might just be.

Though your world gets changed tonight. That would be a cool thing, would it not? When I was a teenager, a friend of mine showed me a movie. Now, I'm not a big movie person, but when I saw this movie, I quickly became a staunch defender of it as one of the great movies.

[5 : 00] And so, it is a film I've seen many, many times. I would happily watch it tonight if it was on, and I would quote lines that I now have locked into my brain. I would sing along with songs from the soundtrack that, again, are etched in there deeply.

And I would eagerly anticipate the scene as Coach Boone looks at the buses at the start of pre-season camp for the T.C. Williams American football team.

Now, if you haven't seen Remember the Titans, I have to explain this scene to you. It's like classic Denzel Washington.

He sees, he's the coach of this football team. It's set in like 1971 America in the South, and so there's like in the midst of strong racial tensions. And he's at this, the starting point of this pre-season camp, and all the players at this mixed-race university are getting on the coaches to go off to camp.

And so, what they do is they file the black players go onto one bus, and the white players go onto the other bus. And Denzel Washington rocks up, and he sees this scene, and he sees the white families with the white bus ready to wish them goodbye, and the black families with that bus trying to wish them goodbye.

[6 : 16] And he looks at the group, and he calls out, he says, I don't care if you're black, blue, green, yellow, or white. If you're an offensive player, I want you to get on this bus.

And if you're a defensive player, I want you to get on that bus. Let's move, let's move, let's move. And then he says, and you'll sit next to a player of a different race to you, and you are going to get used to them, because you're going to room with that person for the duration of this camp.

And the thing is, all the players, they're trying to get picked for the team. So they're going to do what coach says, even though they're quite uncomfortable about this situation. And so over the next sort of like 20, 30 minutes of the movie, you journey with these guys who are working through their prejudices.

And they come back from camp, and they've had this transformative experience. It's been the time of their lives. And so they are high-fiving, and they are hugging, and they are handshaking, but they come back to a world that is exactly the same as what they left.

The white family is on one side, the black family is on the other, and all the parents of both are going, what on earth has happened on that camp?

[7 : 31] And they start playing football in a world where they are like the enlightened ones. They've worked through these differences, but the other teams haven't.

And it's epitomized by an opposing coach who's asked in a pre-game media conference if he has anything to say to Coach Boone, the character played by Denzel Washington.

And he says, with a snarl, I don't have anything to say to that monkey. And this experience of undergoing deep change while others don't is what the woman at the center of our passage experiences as she interacts with Jesus.

She goes through this deep change while the other character in the passage doesn't.

We're going to look at this with three headings tonight. Deliberation versus desperation. Delaying versus doing. And finally, faithless versus forgiven.

[8 : 37] But before we get to that first point of deliberation versus desperation, I want to draw your attention to what came just before the story in the early part of our Bible reading. Because in Luke's narrative of Jesus' life, our reading, the story that we come across there, serves as an illustration of something that Jesus has said just before.

There's been this interaction between John the Baptist and Jesus. And Jesus addresses the crowd and He tells them that John was the real deal. So we get this note in verse 29.

Have a look at it. All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right because they had been baptized by John.

But the Pharisees and the experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves because they had not been baptized by John. And so Jesus points out that the hardness of heart going on in the Pharisees is a big issue.

And He says, verse 33, For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say he's a demon. Verse 34, The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend, this is such a beautiful phrase, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

[10 : 03] And so the story is then an illustration of what it means for Jesus to be a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

Deliberation versus desperation. We start the story in verse 36. We read, This is about as unsensational a scene as you could get.

Like if there was a crowd in the first century that Jesus was going to be expected to hang out with, it was the Pharisees. He was a religious teacher, they were the religious teachers, you would expect that they're going to be friends.

But what we've already started to see is that there's some tension between Jesus and the Pharisees because of this John the Baptist issue. And so Simon the Pharisee invites Jesus to dinner, but it seems like he's got a little bit of an agenda.

It seems like he's sort of in an adjudicator position. He wants to work out who Jesus is. He probably isn't hostile to Jesus, but he's very much deliberating.

[11 : 16] The jury is out. As far as Simon is concerned. And he's contrasted with the woman we meet in the next verse. In verse 37, a woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house and so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume.

And so if verse 36 was expected, verse 37 is, to put it mildly, unexpected. If I can say this frankly, when was the last time that you had a prostitute rock up to your house unannounced with perfume during a dinner party?

This is embarrassing for Simon. It raises all sorts of questions. And you know what?

The woman knows that she isn't following appropriate sociological conventions. In fact, it's worse than you imagine. Jesus reclining at this meal suggests that he's sharing a kosher meal with Simon.

It's quite a significant, structured meal. He's richly clean for this. He's supposed to be. And so this is a formal, religiously significant meal and the woman barges in.

[12 : 34] Now she's used to being shunned. She's used to being dismissed. She's used to being used. But such is her desperation for Jesus that she's prepared to go through all of that.

To show her devotion to him. There's something about Jesus which has drawn her to him. Perhaps she has heard of this reputation of being a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

Maybe he will be my friend. That may be completely fine today to work for His Majesty's Revenue and Customs. That is a noble profession to collect tax in our society.

It wasn't back then. You're a tax collector back then. It's like you're a phone scammer today. No one respects you. You're like worthy of derision. They were the people whose line of work made them worthy of public ridicule and shunning.

If Jesus is friends with them, maybe He'll be a friend to me. The woman thinks. You see that difference?

[13 : 44] While Simon is deliberating about who Jesus is and standing in judgment over Him, the woman is desperate. And here we have the setup of the story.

The religious man who is being hospitable. Opening his home. Putting on a good spread. Or the sinful woman who is charging in unannounced. The religious, deliberating.

The sinner, desperate. Second point, delaying versus doing. You see, shocked as he undoubtedly is, Simon holds his tongue long enough to see that actually this is going to be an interesting test for Jesus.

He can just sort of sit back and watch to see how Jesus handles this interaction. And he's going to make his judgment based on that. After all, the claim is that Jesus is some great prophet.

And so Simon says nothing. He watches. He watches. And he watches the woman come in. He watches her crying. He watches her tears dropping onto Jesus' dusty feet.

[14 : 52] Creating droplets of mud that start trickling onto the floor. He watches. He watches. He watches as she starts to wipe those dirty, muddy feet with her hair.

He watches as she starts pouring the jar of perfume onto Jesus' feet. It's worth saying.

This is a weird scene. And it's not like there's some obscure Old Testament prophecy that says, when the Savior comes, he's going to have hairy feet.

And this is like a way that this is fulfilled. It's not like that. There's no precedent for this. There's not some weird ancient custom. It's just in our Bibles because it happened.

And Luke records this because it's so remarkable the way that Jesus reacts. He goes, if you want to know what Jesus is like, you've got to hear about the time the woman came to the dinner party.

[16 : 00] What was Simon's reaction? He says nothing out loud. Verse 39 of chapter 7. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, if this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him.

And what kind of woman she is. That she is a sinner. Now remember, this was a religiously significant feast for ritually clean Jews.

Jesus couldn't possibly know who this woman is. Because if he did, and he knew that she was unclean, he wouldn't let her do this. Simon is starting to reach his conclusions in his adjudications.

He's been delaying and he's about to reach a verdict. But those conclusions are met with a challenge. Because while he's thinking these things, saying them to himself, verse 40, Jesus answered him, Simon, I have something to tell you.

And Jesus tells this story about how the person who has been forgiven much, loves much. And as Simon tracks with the story, Jesus spells it out for him.

[17 : 12] Verse 44, do you see this woman? I mean, how could you not? Right? Like it's the thing that's happened in the evening. Everything is revolving around her. And yet Simon doesn't see the woman.

Simon sees an unclean sinner who he thinks doesn't belong. Jesus sees a friend. And he continues, verse 44, you did not give me any water for my feet.

But she wet my feet with her tears. And wiped them with her hair. And Jesus goes on to spell out the ways that Simon has broken his social responsibilities. And actually, the woman has sort of played the role of host that he has failed to do.

You know, Luke isn't the only one to share this story, this account from Jesus' life. It's in the other Gospels as well, Matthew and Mark. And I love the words of Jesus that Mark includes.

Mark 14, 8, same story. Jesus is defending the woman to his disciples. And he summarizes her actions by saying, she did what she could. She did what she could.

[18 : 26] Because here's this woman. She's got no power in society. She's got no voice. She's got no respectability. She's got nothing. She does what she can to show desperation to Jesus.

She did what she could. And, you know, when it comes to us showing our devotion to Jesus. When it comes to us showing our obedience to Jesus.

I don't think God expects any more of us than that. Wouldn't it be great? Just imagine this day. The final day. You stand before Jesus.

And he says, well done, good and faithful servant. You did what you could. The doing of this woman isn't anything more than what she could do in the moment.

She did what she could with who she was and what she had. And I think sometimes we can make the bar of Christian faithfulness so high in our minds that we walk around with this perpetual guilt complex.

[19 : 23] And I think it's especially true when it comes to the area of evangelism and mission. I should have said this. I shouldn't have said that. I could have taken this opportunity.

And if that's our default, then be encouraged by this woman who simply did what she could. When you have a go at sharing your faith.

When you pray for your family member. Jesus is there saying, you're doing what you can. He's not berating you for not doing more.

But as we think about doing what we can, maybe this is a good time to evaluate your life and think about who has God made you to be. What experiences has God given you?

What gifts do others say that you have? There's probably more than you think. What can you be doing? You know, it's easy when you're at a church like St. Silas to lose our sense of perspective.

[20 : 29] We're in a church here and this church family has been growing magnificently. It's so encouraging. And there are new people who are moving into the city for study or work. This is one of the churches that they check out if they come to Glasgow.

And we start getting used to seeing full barns. We're duplicating our morning service. We're seeing people come. We're getting people baptised.

And it's great. It is so fantastic. It's such an encouragement to visit a church that's experiencing that kind of growth. But take every member of St. Silas. Like, imagine everyone who sort of vaguely calls St. Silas home.

They all rock up on the one Sunday. It's absolutely packed to the rafters in here. Take all of those people. And seek them in Hampton Park. And think about the tens of thousands of people, the hundreds of thousands of people, who live a stone's throw away.

Who, like the Ninevites in Jonah's day, don't know their right hand from their left when it comes to things of Christ. And all of a sudden, the barns don't seem that full. When we let ourselves look to the fields, the full barn doesn't seem all that impressive.

[21 : 49] Now, we're thankful for the barn. We really are. It's so good what God has done amongst us. But imagine if St. Silas as a church was full of people who, rather than being satisfied with full barns, we're all looking out to the fields and asking, what can I do?

That's an exciting church to be a part of. We've seen deliberation versus desperation. We've seen delaying versus doing.

Our final point for tonight, faithless versus forgiven. You know, Simon the Pharisee, his last words in the story, his last recorded words in history, as far as I can tell, come in verse 43.

They're in response to Jesus asking who in the story loves more. In verse 43, Simon replied, I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven. And so the final word he speaks is a theoretical adjudication about forgiveness.

And we don't know what happened after this, but at this point, Simon is marked by a lack of faith in Jesus. All he had to do was ask to be forgiven.

[23 : 12] But that's actually something that's very difficult for the self-righteous to do. If it is that you're here tonight and you feel that you don't really need a, you don't really have a need to be forgiven, it's worth you knowing that that's actually quite a religious thought to have.

Self-righteous thought. Self-righteous thought. In contrast to that, Jesus says to the woman, Your sins are forgiven.

The other guests began to say amongst themselves, we're in verse 49 now, Who is this who even forgives sins? And Jesus said to the woman, Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.

Do you remember how the story began? Do you remember how we were first introduced to this woman? The woman who had lived a sinful life. That was her story. That was her reputation.

That was her identity. A woman who had lived a sinful life. Until she meets the friend of tax collectors and sinners. And at the end of the story, her life is marked by peace.

[24 : 37] The forgiveness of sins. And peace. There's only one hope for this city. There's only one way for this city and the people within it to find peace.

There's only one hope for your friend, your colleague, your classmate. There's only one hope for you. And it is not a path of moral improvement. Of seeking to become self-righteous.

It's a friend. A friend in the person of Jesus who shows the full extent of his love for you. The full extent of his friendship.

By bearing the sins of his friends on the cross. So that when he says, your sins are forgiven. It isn't just a nice thing to say.

It is a concrete reality. Paid by his blood. And what I love about that line, that he's a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

[25 : 39] What I love about it is it begins as a slur. It's a slur on the lips of the Pharisees about Jesus. A slanderous remark.

And in Remember the Titans, after the Titans have beaten that team with the coach who made that comment about Denzel Washington. They're on the field afterwards and the teams are shaking hands.

And Boone, Denzel Washington's character, holds out his hand to the opposition coach. And the opposing coach, despite having this opportunity to soften and to yield, doesn't do so.

He snubs him and he keeps on walking. And as he walks away, Boone calls out, coach! And he turns around, surprised. And Denzel Washington throws him a banana.

As if to say, you just lost to a monkey. And what he does is he turns his slur against him. The slur of the coach becomes his glory.

[26 : 47] And that's what happens here. This slur that is on the lips of Jesus becomes his glory. If you're here tonight and you don't know Jesus, you need to know this, that you can accept him or reject him.

You can come up with reasons to be faithless. You can even throw slurs at him. He will hold his hand out to tax collectors and sinners wanting to be their friend.

And at the end of the day, when all is said and done, and Jesus is with his friends for eternity, all the slurs, all the labels, all the scoffing, all the rejection, all of it only does one thing.

It makes Jesus look more glorious. Would you join me in praying to our glorious King? Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for Jesus.

We thank you that he endured the slurs because of his desire to be a friend. And we pray tonight, Jesus, that you would help us, that you would send us out to be holding out that same hand to all people around us.

[28 : 07] And we pray that the self-righteous and the tax collectors and sinners would know their need for the forgiveness of sins. Would you send us?

Would you be with us on that task? And would you cause all of it to further your glory in this world? In Christ's name we pray. Amen.