

Christ and the sinful woman 2

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[0 : 0 0] Turn by with me to the passage we read in Luke's Gospel, chapter 7. We looked at this section last week, the Pharisee's house, where Jesus went for a meal, where he was anointed by the sinful woman.

And we looked at the three characters last week, the Pharisee, the woman, and also the prophet, and that was Jesus, of course. And I would like to broaden it just for a few minutes, simply this evening.

So we looked at the wider principles that underlie this passage and underlie the teaching and the life and the witness and the work of Jesus Christ. Because it comes through the whole of the Gospel, what we have here, and we could almost read this as an anthem passage in every day of our lives, because it encapsulates everything that the Gospel is and everything that the Gospel is about, and it focuses, of course, in the centrality of love and the extravagance of love.

And we noticed in the first place that the Gospel of love is of the essence, and that is essential to us, that we remember and know that the Gospel of love is of the essence, because God is love.

And we know that from 1 John John, the beloved apostle, who was so close to Christ in his letter, says, whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

[1 : 2 4] No one has ever seen God, but if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is made complete to us. So God is love. And the Gospel is a Gospel of love.

And the Gospel is motivated. The motivation behind Jesus Christ coming to earth is the love of God for people like you and people like me.

And when we become Christians, we are born again of the Holy Spirit. And when we are born again, we are adopted into God's family.

But it's more than just a bare adoption. We are adopted not just legally into this family, but congenitally or physically, we become part of God's family.

We receive God and the love of God and the character of God into our hearts. And this package of grace is essential to us, and the love of God is essential to us.

[2 : 2 5] His work in our hearts and in our society is to destroy hatred and division and mistrust and bitterness and all the problems that Satan has brought in.

And his package of grace in our hearts enables us to do that, because his love is central to us. It's the principal foundation to all that we are and all that we have.

Colossians 3 talks about compassion and tenderness and humility and gentleness and patience and forgiveness. And over all these things, he says, put on love, because it binds them together in a perfect unity.

It's the cement, the foundation of cement that binds every characteristic that we have as Christians. It's the first evidence that people see that we belong to the Father, that we're Christians, because it's the first fruit of the Spirit.

You know how when a baby's born, people look to see which parent is like, the child is like, and they look for characteristics there. Well, when people see us born again of the Spirit, they want to see the first and foremost characteristic of the kingdom, and that is that we have the love of God in our souls.

[3 : 45] And a quite remarkable thing he said by Paul. Paul must have gone into the seventh heaven to have said this and to have been taught this. Because in Ephesians 3 he says, I pray when he's speaking to the people that you, being rooted and established in love, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge.

And then he says, that you may be filled with the measure of all the fullness of God. Can you imagine this privilege that we have of being filled with the fullness of God through the love of Christ in our souls?

We talk about theology, and a thousand books can't say what that says. That with Christ and with the love of Christ in us, we are filled to the measure of the fullness of God.

That's an amazing reality. We are to show faith which is expressed through love. It is by grace that we're saved. Christ calls it the greatest commandment.

Loving God, loving your neighbour. It's the fulfilment of the law. People say, preach the law. What is the law but the fulfilment of love?

[5 : 00] Romans 13.10. We preach the law. But we preach the law through love. It's the greatest gift of the Holy Spirit. People say, give us the gifts. We want to speak in tongues.

The greatest gift of the Spirit is the love of Christ in our souls. It's the test of true discipleship. If you love one another, then you will know you're my disciples. It's the test of true service.

Peter, do you love me? Then feed my sheep. It's the test of true speech. True behaviour in Christ is the love of God in us. The love comes into our souls to turn us round from sin and to turn us to God.

If we remain happy as we are, if we're happy with the level we're at, if we're content with the sin that we have in our souls, then we're going to fight for content with the society we live in and with the people around us, then we will hate heaven.

Because heaven will be a place of absolute and total and complete love. This sinful woman here shared the essence of that love. So it's of the essence.

[6 : 05] The test of the way we see that the love of Christ in our hearts is costly. And there is a lot of people who will say and who will argue that love and speaking about love and preaching about love is the easy option.

No, well, he's just a shallow preacher because he preaches about love. That we're quoting the world when we mention love and that we're trying to woo people in with this false sense of security about love.

That it's a simplistic way to speak. To speak about love and the love of the gospel. We want the law. We want heaven. We want hell. We want all these things. Because the love of Christ is a shallow thing to preach about.

But far from it. Maybe the love of an unconverted preacher who preaches a simplistic love. But the love of the gospel is a costly love.

And it's a costly love in our own lives. And the demands that are made of the love of Christ. Because the love of Christ demands self-denial. It demands that we reject the world and the world's principles.

[7 : 03] It's not so easy to love with the love of Christ. It's not so easy to be born again with the Holy Spirit of God in us. It's not so easy to have the purity of Christ in our soul.

Not so easy to know the love of Christ in us. Because the love of Christ is different from what the world says. The world says, treat other people as they treat you. Live and let live.

It doesn't matter. Money equals happiness. Live for today. The world speaks about just accepting moral standards. It's happy with formal religion.

But we leave all that behind in Christ. We can't live that way. We can't think like the world. We can't act like the world. We can't have the same principles as the world. Because the love of Christ in us tells us that we must obey his way.

And follow his way of doing things. Whoever has my commands and obeys them. He is the one who loves me. We are walking of this love. It's not shallow. It's not basic.

[8 : 04] It's not simplistic. It's not weak. It's about the love. Obeying Christ Jesus. The attitude of the servant. Washing the disciples' feet.

Loving the end. All these commands that Christ gives us. Based on his own love in our hearts. And his work of reconciliation. Vertically and horizontally. It gives us these commands and demands.

That we show love to the enemy. That we show hospitality to the poor. Jesus says don't ask people all the time. Who you know will give you an invite back. That's not real love.

That's not showing love. Because you know you're just going to get back in return. He says ask and invite the people into your home. Who you know will not have the ability to invite you back. People who need to know your love and fellowship in their home.

Who will give you no return. It's love that talks about controlling our tongue. It's love that talks about being brave enough to warn our unbelieving friends. And risk their friendship because we know that they're going to a lost eternity without Christ.

[9 : 06] It's love that takes the risk of being called naive and foolish. Even within the church. And isn't it sad that the way of love sometimes is regarded as naive within the church. Or run alone sonny until you grow up. Until you learn what church is all about.

About politics and about hating one another. And about going your own way. Love is about walking the extra mile. It's about praying for those who hate you.

It's about loving the brethren. It's about serving Christ out of the convenience hours. It's about doing these things for Christ.

It's about not returning wrong for wrong. When somebody wrongs you then you're willing to be wronged. It's the same no to ungodly passions that so often we say yes to. And all these demands of love that Christ pours down into our soul and into our hearts become a joy for us.

Only when love is the motivation. Otherwise they are a chore. and otherwise our religion is a religion of works but out of love and with the love of Christ in us they become an act of love and they become the outpouring or the overflowing of a heart that loves Jesus Christ it's only the divine love that enables us to do that and that's what it means to be filled with the fullness of God do we recognise the privilege of being filled with the fullness of God through the obedience to Jesus Christ now if that's shallow yes, who needs deep because that is the gospel and the sinful woman, she knew the cost that was involved and the love of God in her heart there is a cost to pay and it is that self-denial and obedience but also, thirdly, and this is a bit of a cumbersome heading but nonetheless, it's very important the outpouring of this love stems from a sense of being forgiven and we touched on this last week but it's very important the outpouring of the love of God in us stems from a sense of being forgiven ourselves in other words, the more we move into Christ the more that we recognise God and who he is the closer we are to him then the nearer we are to the light because not only is God love but God is light and the closer we are to the light then the darker our deeds appear and are and the more the light exposes the sinful corners in our hearts and our darkness is exposed so as we fall into Christ as we move into Christ through the fellowship of his people through God's word through prayer then we become more aware of our own sin

[12 : 05] I could never understand when I was younger older Christians more mature Christians when they spoke and they said my heart is very sinful and very black I sometimes thought being self-righteous in a back to front way but I recognise and know now that that's not the case and I see the principle at work that the older we become in Christ the more mature we become in Christ the closer we are to him the deeper we do see ourselves the deeper the sin is in our hearts not because we're sinning necessarily anymore God forbid hopefully we're sinning less but because God is revealing to us more of what our heart is really like and sometimes that closeness to Christ can be overwhelming when we draw close to him and this is slightly on the side when we draw near to him in this way and are aware in the air that is full and free and absolute forgiveness and the forgiving love then I think we can begin to sense what the sinful woman sensed her lostness and yet her foundness

I think her tears her overwhelmed tears came from being in close proximity to Christ she was overwhelmed by being near Christ and there is a sense that we can experience that and I'm sure you have at times as I have a closeness to Jesus Christ that leaves us awestruck spine tingled where we've drawn into his presence maybe after a time of severe blessing or after a time of deep deep sin and on our knees we are just over by the knowledge of his closeness to us the sense of our own weakness sense of our unworthiness and yet the sense of his greatness to be in his presence like that where the blood within our veins flows quicker and the tears of emotion cannot be kept back you know what that presence is like where there's a warmth that is quite indescribable and quite inexplicable where without saying anything or doing anything we fall on our knees and know in that instance that Christ's loving arms are round about us and that overwhelming closeness is what draws the love of Christ to us and what makes us aware of what we are as people and I think sometimes we're very afraid of that kind of thing maybe we even sigh back from the kind of behaviour of the sinful woman maybe afraid of the charismatics and the way they seem to go overboard emotionally maybe it's just because of our own Scottish nature which is generally very reserved but I think when we do that when we hold back all the time or when we leave everything just on the surface or on the just the edges of our own existence then we lose the human spiritual and divine power of Christ's loving

Christ's love for us because that moment that instant when we're in Christ like that is worth a thousand sermons and worth a thousand years because it's so spiritually refreshing and we can only get that by drawing close in meditation and in prayer to him setting time aside and being in his presence and when we do find these times of closeness and when Christ is almost so close we can touch him then we are made aware in that glorious moment we are made aware of our sin and it's our blackness as well and we are made aware of how full and free his forgiveness is and therefore we love more and the more sin that's removed from us through that recognition as we ask for forgiveness the more Christ replaces that emptiness with his fullness and with the fullness of his love and that is how those who are forgiven much love much not necessarily because they've come from more sinful or deprived backgrounds which may be the case but because they've grown in grace and because they recognize Christ and the oldest greatest saint is probably the one who will say

I love much because I've been forgiven much but you see if we don't have any progress in Christ if we just remain with a knowledge of the truth and with a possession of the truth but no personal development then we remain the same kind of sinners we always were we don't really see the much need for forgiveness if we are asking it's for the same kind of forgiveness all the time it's not coming on to deeper levels it's for little things it's for daily quirks it's not for this deep rooted sense of pride and blackness and if that's how we remain then we remain full of ourselves and there's little room for Jesus but we do need this love of Christ in our hearts because it's the only thing that removes from us a spirit of judgmentalness or criticism or bad understanding of how other people are as Christians so this outpouring of love it stems from a sense of personally having been forgiven and I close very briefly with a warning from the passage which is against the great danger of

Phariseeism comes across here the great danger of legalistic righteousness that whatever we are or whatever we've been that we move away from the centrality of the personal walk and relationship with Christ where his divine love enters into us not the human emotion not frothiness not weakness but the deep divine fullness of God enters into us as his redeeming work seeks to do and we move away to a legalistic righteousness where we argue before God I give my time I go to church I attend a prayer meeting I give thanks I'm not like other people who profess their faith in Christ and live like they they do can we make that the basis of our faith when that's all that matters to us each and every one of these things good in and themselves but only as they stem from our love of Christ stem from a basis of love in our souls beware of co-dignity of correctness without a soul for Christ of orthodoxy without emotion and passion and desire because the whole man is saved and that involves our tears and our love and our emotions and our feelings why do I feel the need to to beware or warn against phantasyism partly because

[19:10] Jesus does it so much in the word but also because I know it's appealing to our sinful hearts very appealing to our sinful hearts because it has the religious side and yet there's a kind of self-righteousness about it and it's easy to be that kind of person because it's just do's and don'ts it's not about opening our soul to God at all it's just about working our way into his favour beware of it too because it's been and always has been and will be and is today a very powerful tool in the devil's weaponry in an established church doesn't do it in the world does it in the church and he's done it through the ages and he will continue to do it and you know in the name of purity and in the name of upholding tradition and in the name of defending the faith any amount of lovelessness and any amount of division is accepted and we need to beware of that in our denomination in these days

Amen we'll bow our heads and pray Gracious God we ask for your blessing on us and pray that you would give us wisdom and grace and love in our hearts we ask that we would examine our souls in the mirror of scripture each day that we would wrestle with God in prayer that we would seek the blessing and ask that we would not let go until you bless us that we would recognize the power in praying and wrestling and spending time and self-denying effort to raise God to raise to raise his standard here to raise his banner to engage him and work on our behalf to plead for his energetic involvement in our souls to ask for cleansing to ask for alertness and awareness spiritual wisdom and grace guide us in these days help us to know what to do guide us in the secret will of God in these days for our own hearts and for our own congregation and we ask that we would each one do our bit to stand up for Christ by living with the light of the gospel in our hearts that we would beware of the devil's tactics that we would be strong and visionary and humble and that we would know exactly what path we are being asked to take we ask oh Lord God that you would give us thankful hearts and tremendous joy in our souls as we look back on

Kenny's ministry here and its great power and its great blessing and how he's been used and we know and believe and have faith to know that he will continue to be used without fear without favour we ask and pray Lord that we would remember the debt we owe to him in our own souls and many here coming to Christ through his preaching and we rejoice in that and pray that we would not be morbid but nonetheless that we would not shrug off the change in circumstances as being kind of just a cold and calculated thing but may we recognise and see your hand and give thanks and seek that his latter days in the ministry however that will work out will be ten and twenty times as blessed as his former days and we ask and pray that we might see revival in our own congregation to this whole community

Lord we seek to reach out we seek your grace and your glory and your peace and your strength and we ask for vision and the anxious hearts to be stilled for Jesus sake Amen