

Love Poured Out

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 January 2017

Preacher: Ian Naismith

[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning, everyone. I repeat, Graeme's welcome to be delighted to have everyone here this morning as we've been worshipping. And now as we come to look at God's Word, as Graeme said, we're returning to Luke's Gospel, to the Galilean ministry of the Lord Jesus, where he was going around performing miracles, teaching, debating, and causing great wonder and amazement at what he did and who he was. And we've got this morning an incident that is unique to Luke's Gospel. It's not found in the other Gospels. There are anointings of Jesus feed by a woman in all four Gospels, but the one in Luke is at an earlier stage in Jesus' ministry and also with a different focus from the ones in the other Gospels. So this is an incident that is only in Luke's Gospel. If you have a Bible, it'd be good to turn to it. We will put the words up on the screen, but as we go through, it'll be good if you're able to follow it in your Bible. So it's Luke chapter 7, and we're starting to read at verse 36. Luke 7 verse 36. And it says,

Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume. And 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 is 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 men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him 500 denarii and the other 50. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he cancelled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more? Simon replied, I suppose the one who had the bigger debt cancelled. You have judged correctly, Jesus said. Then he turned to 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 has 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, for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little, loves little. 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. And God, I'm sure, will bless his word as we consider it together this morning. There was a fairly minor item in the news this week which caught my attention, and it's illustrated in this picture here. If you're into TV detective, you probably recognize Morse and Lewis, John Thaw and Kevin Wakeley. But the person I'm actually interested in is the man who's sitting in the background, just a shadow in behind the two main characters.

And that man is Colin Dexter, who is the author of the Morse stories. And the new story this week is that apparently Colin Dexter has appeared in almost every episode of Morse and his spin-offs, Lewis and Endeavor, in that kind of cameo role. He's been a tramp, or he's been a porter at a college, or he's been a man in a pub, like he is here. It has been kind of his signature that he has appeared in it as kind of him saying, this is my story. I'm not the main character. I'm not the one you immediately notice, but it's my story, my books, and I'm in there somewhere. He's retiring because he's 86, which I think gives him a good excuse for not appearing anymore in them. But I was quite struck as I was reading and rereading our passage this morning, that you can see in it very clearly the author. Now, the three main characters clearly are Jesus and Simon, the Pharisee and the sinful woman. But this seems to me to be a classic story that Luke would tell, a classic incident from the life of the Lord Jesus that Luke would think was really worth recording. Now, that's not any way

to say that the scripture isn't inspired by God. It wasn't God who inspired Luke to write what he did here. But in the Bible, among the authors of the Bible books, what God does is he does indeed with all our service for him. He takes the individual's character and their passions and he uses it to his glory. That is what Christian service is or should be about, God taking what he has given us and what he has put in our hearts and using it to glorify him. And that's very much the case in the writers of our Bible.

[5 : 27] And we see time and again in Luke, the same kind of priorities that he emphasizes in the life of the Lord Jesus. And there are two things in particular about this incident, which I think makes a classic one that Luke felt was really worth passing on to us. The first is that the central character alongside the Lord Jesus, the central character is a woman. And in a society where women were undervalued and often downtrodden, Luke is very careful to record how the Lord Jesus constantly treated them with respect and with dignity. So in Luke's gospel, the incarnation, the birth of the Lord Jesus is told largely from his mother Mary's viewpoint. Luke tells us of this lovely incident in the home in Bethany where Jesus goes and has a meal with Mary and Martha, this very domestic thing where one listens to him while the other is serving him. It's Luke who tells us about the widow who goes to the temple and puts into the collection plate everything that she has, her last penny given to God.

And next week, as we move on to chapter 8, we'll see that it's Luke who records that as Jesus went around in his ministry, he was very much supported by a group of women. It wasn't just the disciples.

There was a group of women who were there with him and supporting him. Luke is a gospel where he emphasizes the value of women and their importance in the life of the Lord Jesus.

The second thing in this incident, I think, is classic Luke, is that it's about someone who has hit rock bottom and who is lifted up by the Lord Jesus. A woman is right at the bottom of society and Jesus takes her, assures her of forgiveness and gives her the ability to go on and to serve him.

Again, something very much we see in Luke's gospel. So there's the story of the woman who had the constant menstrual bleeding, had it for 12 years, no money left. In desperation, she comes, touches the Lord's cloak and her faith heals her. There's the story of Zacchaeus, the traitor, the cheat, who has clearly come to the end of himself. Although he had lots of money, he had nothing else.

[7 : 49] And Jesus recognizes him, goes and eats with him and assures him that salvation has come to his house. There's a thief on the cross, two thieves on the cross, remember, but one in particular, as he's hanging there with Jesus, he says, Lord, remember me when you come in your kingdom. And Jesus immediately gives me assurance, today you will be with me in paradise. And then we have Luke's parables.

The parable of Jesus records that the prodigal son who goes back to his father in desperation and is warmly welcomed, or the tax collector goes to the temple and beats his chest and says, God have mercy in me, a sinner. And Jesus says he went away justified. All people who have hit rock bottom in their lives.

And Jesus is the one who is able to lift them up and to assure them that they have his love, that they have forgiveness. And I think above all else, what this story tells us is that there is no one who is beyond forgiveness by Jesus. And it is when we recognize our need for forgiveness that we can really please him and get his approval. Two things in particular I think God's been saying to me, and I think maybe saying to us, as I've thought about and prayed about this incident this morning. The first is, Jesus is more concerned with people who are bad than with people who are good. Or perhaps more accurately, Jesus is more concerned with people who are good than with people who think they are good. So in this story, we've got a woman who knows she's bad. She knows she's a sinner. We've got Simon who thinks he's good and a righteous man, a Pharisee.

And the one who Jesus is really concerned about is the sinner who knows her position before God. That's number one. And then the second thing I suggest we can get from this incident is, I can't start to become truly good until I recognize I am truly bad. In other words, until I recognize that I need forgiveness from Jesus and come to him for that forgiveness, I can set out on a path that will allow me to be more like Jesus to become truly good. Now we'll leave these two statements on the screen for just now and we'll come back to them. And you may see as we go along their relevance. But I think it might be worth just walking through the story and making sure we understand exactly what's happening in it.

So as I said, Jesus is going around in his Galilean ministry. He's teaching. He's saying some things that are quite controversial. Beginning of December, we looked at the previous verses in this chapter where he said, it's really become quite startling things about the religious leaders of his day. [10:38] And he's invited to the house of this man called Simon. Now the first question arises, why did Simon invite Jesus to his home? Was it that he wanted to believe in Jesus? Was he just curious? Was it a kind of show?

I'm an important person. Here's someone people like, so I'll invite him to my home. May have been some or all of these. May also have been, I think, that Simon wanted to show Jesus up and to correct some of the things he'd been saying. That Simon didn't actually believe that Jesus was who he said he was and who the people thought he was. And he wanted to correct him and perhaps to rebuke him. Now we're not told that in speculation. But what I think gives evidence for that is the way in which Simon treated Jesus when Jesus came into his home. Now if I invite you to my home, you might reasonably expect when you knock on the door, I'll open the door, I'll say, come on in, can I take your coat? Why don't you go and find a seat for a few minutes? And you feel as if you're quite welcome, hopefully, when you come to us.

In Jesus' day, the way in which you felt welcome, if you'd been invited to dinner, when you came in, you got a kiss from your host, you were given some oil to wipe on your head because you were probably sweating, having been walking for a while, and you were given water to wash your feet with to get the dust off. Perhaps even if it was a wealthy person, someone would do that for you. But these were the basics that you would expect from any host. You invite someone to your house, you make sure they get a kiss, you make sure they get oil to put on their head, you make sure that they get water so they can wash their feet. And Simon did none of these. Simon invited Jesus to his home, Jesus comes in, notices that Simon hasn't observed the basic politenesses of having a guest, and Jesus goes and he reclines at the table. So another good start from Simon's point of view. We then have the woman who's there. Now why is this woman there? Well, in that day, if you had a dinner party, it wasn't that you just invited your guests and you sat them around the table and you were in a locked house, in a closed room, and no one else was there. If you had a dinner party, if you were kind of the upper reaches of society, anyone was able to come in and to observe it. They could look and they could see how good your hospitality was to your guests, all the food that you put out. Perhaps they could enjoy the learned conversation around the table. People were able to come in and just to see what was happening and everyone was welcome. Well, perhaps not quite everyone, because I'm sure Simon wasn't overpleased when this woman came in along with others into his house. The woman is described as a sinner. Almost certainly that means she was a prostitute and she wasn't the kind of person that

Simon would want to have anything to do with. But he let her come in and she wasn't immediately thrown out. The woman had brought with her this jar of perfume. Now again, we have to say, well, what was her original purpose in bringing this jar of perfume with her? Maybe it was that she wanted to anoint Jesus, but perhaps she would get some opportunity and she could anoint his head. Perhaps that's what her thinking was. The woman comes in and she sees that Simon has deeply insulted Jesus.

[14:04] He has not done what any decent self-respecting host should do, and perhaps she thinks even that he's humiliated the Lord. And she has a deep love for Jesus because she has an understanding of her need for forgiveness. Indeed, she looks like she had come to Jesus for forgiveness, and she thinks it's absolutely awful that this host hasn't done what you'd expect any person to do when you invite someone into your home. So she decides, possibly in the spirit at the moment, she's going to make up for that. She doesn't have a jar of water, but she uses her tears. She doesn't have a towel. She uses her hair, and she uses the perfume that she's brought for whatever reason to pour on Jesus' feet. She is showing that she loves Jesus and that she wants to serve him in a way in which Simon, his host, had totally neglected to serve him. And then we've got Simon sitting there, and Simon's thinking, what's going on here? I'm having a party in my house. I'm a perfectly respectable Pharisee. This woman comes in. She's ruining everything, and Jesus isn't doing anything about it. Doesn't he know he's supposed to be a prophet? Doesn't he know that she's a sinful woman?

Of course, Jesus does know that. But Simon, perhaps already skeptical about Jesus and who he was and what he was doing, Simon thinks, this is terrible. He can't possibly be a prophet if he's allowing the woman to do this thing to him. And Jesus, Simon obviously doesn't see anything.

Perhaps his face gave him away. He doesn't see anything, but Jesus knew what he was thinking, and Jesus tells a very simple and very direct story. In this story, Jesus very cleverly asks a question at the end and a question that can only have one answer. It's a bit like the parable of the Good Samaritan, where Jesus tells the story, and then he says to the teacher of the law, who is the neighbor of this man who is in need, and the teacher of law, there's no choice in the answer. He says, I suppose it was the Samaritan.

It's a bit like that here. Jesus tells a story about two people who are in debt. One fifty denarii, one five hundred denarii. Now, a denarius was what you would get for a day working. So if you were a laborer in a field or something, you'd get to the end of the day, and your employer would say, here's your denarius working in my field, and if you come back tomorrow, you'll get another one. So in broad terms, fifty denarii would be roughly two months wages, allowing for people being off on a Sunday. Five hundred denarii would be getting more towards two years, a bit less than that. Two months wages, it's a big debt, but it's not an absolutely enormous debt. You might think, well, possibly I could pay it off. Two years wages, that is really serious for most people. That is an unrepayable debt. And the man who has owed the money in this case, he lets both of them off, and Jesus says to Simon, well, which of them is going to love him more? As I said, there's only one answer. You're not going to say, oh, there'll be one who got the fifty denarii he let off. Of course, it's the one who is forgiven more, owes more to the individual, and so loves them more when he's forgiven. And then Jesus uses that, and he points out what's happened in this situation. You've got a woman who's been forgiven, and who knows she's been forgiven a huge amount, and she really, really loves Jesus because of that. She knows the debt of her sin. She knows all the failure in her life. She knows she's at rock bottom and been forgiven by

Jesus, and because of that, she passionately loves him and wants to do whatever she can for him. You've got Simon. Now, Simon would have admitted he was a sinner, but would have thought, well, I'm not as much of a sinner as most of the other people round about. I'm a man who tries to do good.

I'm a Pharisee. I try to keep the laws of the Pharisees. I'm basically a good man, although he would have acknowledged, as every Jew would, that he was sinful as well. Now, Jesus doesn't ever say that Simon was forgiven, but if Simon thought he had been in some way forgiven, then he could see, well, perhaps I don't love quite as much of that woman because I don't think I've been forgiven as much as the woman. And so Jesus very pointedly gets across to Simon that what the woman has done is not something shameful. It's not something that he should be embarrassed about. It's something that really shows how much she's been forgiven and how much she loves Jesus.

[18:54] And then he kind of brings it home. He reassures the woman of her forgiveness, and the people are amazed. Now, again, not entirely clear. Are the people amazed in a kind of a good way? They think, wow, this is wonderful. Jesus is able to forgive sin. Or is it people like Simon who are still a bit skeptical and say, well, who does he think he is that he's able to forgive her sins?

But Jesus very clearly saying as the one who can forgive sins, that he is God. And he then, as I say, reassured the woman her sins are forgiven. So that's the story. Let's move on to the two applications, the two things I think we can get from it. Jesus is more concerned with people who know they are bad than with people who think they are good. Jesus' interest in this story is primarily in the woman. Now, he does engage with Simon. He doesn't totally ignore Simon. He tries to help Simon to understand the error of his thinking. But his big concern is that he should be able to affirm to the woman that she's been forgiven. He talks twice about the forgiveness that she's received. He also talks about the faith that has saved her. Jesus' big concern is with the one who knows she's a sinner, who has acknowledged that sin, and who needs to be assured about her forgiveness. I would say that is still the case today. Jesus' big concern is with those who know that they have done wrong. He said he'd not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. And he still wants those who have hit the bottom, who know that they are wrong before God, to come to him and to experience his forgiveness. And ultimately, that's all of us. We have, most of us, quite respectable, varying degrees of respectability and the kind of appearance we put to the outside world.

But all of us need that forgiveness that Jesus can give us. And if we think we're good, if we think, well, I'm generally quite a good, fine living person, then we've kind of missed the point, and we're not going to get the benefit of what Jesus would want to offer to us.

[21 : 20] I had a friend once many years ago, wasn't in this church, though it could have been. It was a Christian friend who I really respected, and he said once, if you knew everything there is to know about me, you'd never talk to me again.

And my immediate reaction to that was, I bet there is more that I'm hiding from you to be ashamed of than that you're not telling me. I think all of us, we wouldn't want everything about us to be open and to be seen by others.

If I were to tell you everything about me, you would probably be very shocked, and perhaps the other way around as well. But what I do know is that Jesus does know everything about me. And Jesus isn't shocked. Jesus looks at my sin, looks at everything I've done that's wrong, and he has compassion on me, and he wants to give me forgiveness. And please don't think, I don't know if anybody in this position, please don't think you've come to church this morning, everyone around you looks good, and they're probably great Christians, and you're a kind of sinner sitting among saints.

[22 : 27] You're not. You're a sinner sitting among sinners, and we all need the forgiveness that Jesus offers to us. And he's able to do that, of course, because of his death on the cross, because he went to Calvary to take the sins of the world on himself.

And for those who trust in him and confess their sins to him, we can be sure that our sins are forgiven, and that he will lift us out of the gutter from the place we've got ourselves into, and he will give us real meaning and reason in life, and real hope for the future.

Jesus is more concerned with people who know they are bad than with people who think they are good. Then the second lesson, I can't start to become truly good until I recognize I am truly bad. Again, Simon, a man who thought he was good, a man who thought he was religious, he was above people like this woman who'd come into his house, he did his best to live a good life, and he didn't really, it appears, recognize fully the sin in his life.

Woman, very aware of her sin, very aware of how wicked she had been, but got on the right road to becoming truly good by confessing her sins, by trusting in the Lord Jesus, and by choosing to follow him.

[23 : 53] I can't start to become truly good until I recognize I am truly bad. And when I recognize that, and when I put my trust in Jesus, then there should be in me that love for Jesus that this woman had and displayed so much.

And it is when we love Jesus, and when we really want to serve him because we know what he has done for us, and the forgiveness that we have in him, that we can start to become like him, and to be on the path, at least, to becoming truly good.

It is in loving Jesus, and in wanting to serve him, and to follow him, that God is able to take us, and to make us more like his son.

And that is seen particularly in the way we deal with other people. Now, there is in the New Testament a lot about how we are in private compared with how we are in public, but very much through the New Testament, our love for the Lord Jesus is demonstrating our love for one another, and perhaps for those whom we don't even know.

Love for Christ is seen in love for others. And the forgiveness we've experienced through Christ should also be seen in the forgiveness that we offer to others.

[25 : 13] I think the challenge for some of us this morning is have we recognised just how bad we are without the Lord Jesus. I think in some ways it's a particular challenge for those of us who've grown up in church, in Christian families, who've known the truth of the gospel all our lives, and perhaps can easily take them for granted and not recognise just what we would be if it wasn't for the Lord Jesus.

We need to understand our sinfulness before we can truly follow Jesus and have the love for him that we should. There's another story in the news this week, rather more significant than the one I referred to earlier.

This lady was Jill Sayward. Jill Sayward died this week at the relatively young age of 51. 30 years ago, Jill Sayward was brutally raped and abused in what became known as the Ealing Vicarage Robbery.

There were thieves burst into her house and beat up her father and her boyfriend and raped her. And to make things worse, when the case came to trial, the judge made a statement that said, well, she didn't really suffer very much trauma and he gave a very lenient sentence to those who had

raped her.

Now, totally wrong what he said and totally wrong in his sentence. He gave a much harsher sentence to someone who had been involved in the robbery and hadn't actually been involved in the rape. Jill Sayward has probably done more than anyone else in this country to help the position of women who've been raped and how they're treated, particularly by the police and the judiciary.

[26 : 50] But she's also a Christian and she became known particularly for the forgiveness that she offered. As a Christian, she believed the right thing was to be able to give forgiveness even to those who had done such an evil thing.

She actually met one of the robbers, not one of the ones who raped her, the other robbers, she met him later and expressed personally that forgiveness to him. Someone who knew God's forgiveness and was willing to put it into practice and to show her love for the Lord Jesus to others.

Jill Sayward's father, who was the vicar, who was also very seriously injured in that attack, was Michael Sayward. And Michael Sayward, as well as being a Christian minister, was a very fine hymn writer.

And I want to end with some of the words from one of his most famous hymns, which I think really sums up a lot of what we've been talking about this morning. These are the words of Michael Sayward.

Lord of the cross of shame, set my cold heart aflame with love for you, my saviour and my master, who on that lonely day bore all my sins away and saved me from the judgment and disaster.

[28 : 07] Lord of my life today, teach me to live and pray as one who knows the joy of sins forgiven. So may I ever be now and eternally one with the citizens of heaven.

Let's pray together. Amen. Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the power of this incident in the life of the Lord Jesus and of this woman who was in many ways so desperate and yet who had such a great love for him and such a great desire to serve him.

We thank you that it teaches us that there is no one who is too bad to be forgiven. If we're willing to acknowledge our sin, then the blood of the Lord Jesus is sufficient to cover all our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Help us all to understand that and to put our trust in him. And those of us who know him, those of us who experience that forgiveness, help us to understand just how great our sin is and just how wonderful our forgiveness is, that we may have a real passionate love for the Lord Jesus and a desire to serve him and to please him.

We pray that you will take us and that you will use us to his glory. We thank you for our time together. We pray that now as we come to share communion and to remember again the death of the Lord Jesus, that you will help us to understand just a little bit more of what the cost of forgiveness for our sins was and to love him a bit more too.

[29 : 52] We ask for your presence. We give your thanks. In Jesus' name. Amen.