

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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The Incomparable Christ - Christ the Sin-Forgiver

Today we come to the second talk in our present series entitled, "The Incomparable Christ". Last week we considered Christ the Sower and Seeker. I understand the word for 'sowing' in Matthew 13:24 is 'broadcasting' - how appropriate that God's Word should be broadcasted today. What an encouragement too, the Scripture which tells us that "the word of the Lord shall not return unto Him void [or empty], but it shall accomplish that which He pleases, and it shall prosper that for which He sent it", Isaiah 55:11. Christ is still sowing and seeking today. I recall recently hearing a believer being interviewed and the questioner saying to him, "tell us about the day when you found Jesus". His reply was, "I'll tell you about the day when Jesus found me"! To Zacchaeus, Jesus said, "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost". Luke 19:10.

Our theme today follows on from last week and we will consider Christ the Sin-Forgiver. We will read verses from Luke 7 and Matthew 18, as well as referring to many others as time allows. The question, no doubt asked indignantly by the Pharisees in Luke 7:49 is a good starting point for our study. "Who is this that forgiveth sins also?" I was going to omit the "also", but really that gives the force of what they were saying. They had no difficulty in accepting the fact that God forgives sins; but the question was, who was THIS MAN who, as well as God, was forgiving sins?

The most important thing, which lies at the very basis of our faith, is our understanding of who Jesus Christ is. Many people have many and varied ideas as to who He is:

- a good man,
- a prophet,
- a wonderful teacher,
- an example as to how to live, etc.

Whilst He is all of these, He is so much more! The Apostle John wrote his Gospel in order that we might "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing we might have life through His name", John 20:31.

The Apostle Paul writing to the Christians at Rome says, "Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen", Romans 9:5. So from these Scriptures (and there are others we could quote), we see that Jesus Christ is God. This was the problem for the Pharisees; they couldn't grasp that THIS MAN was God.

Our understanding and enjoyment of the things of God begins then, necessarily, with a proper understanding of the person of Christ, the 'Incomparable Christ'. At the time in the Lord's life when there was much discussion as to who He was, we read He gathered His disciples together and asked them, "Who do men say that I am?" (Matthew 16:13, Mark 8:27 and Luke 9:18). Whilst men thought He was John the Baptist (raised from the dead) or Elijah or Jeremiah or some of the other prophets (Matthew 16:14), His disciple Peter, through divine revelation, said in reply to the Lord's question, "Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16).

As we think of Christ the Sin-Forgiver, we think of the only one able to accomplish the work of redemption. The only sinless man who could surrender His sinless life to be the sin-bearer, the sacrifice for your sins and mine, if we trust in Him.

Before we go any further in our talk, I want to state three basic Scriptural facts which are plainly taught, but sadly it would appear not so plainly understood today.

1. **The Bible clearly teaches that mankind was created in innocence and as such enjoyed communion with God**

Our first parents, Adam and Eve sinned (Genesis 3:1-7) when they disobeyed God's commandment (Genesis 2:16-17) and as a result their offspring were born in a sinful condition. King David recognised this. We read in Psalm 51:5, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me". So we learn that King David, like every one of us, was a sinner before he sinned. He was a sinner in nature before he was a sinner in practice. Adam as head of the human race has by his disobedience plunged all mankind into sin, and as a result there exists a distance between

us and God. It is a fact that none born from a human relationship could ever be without sin nor be a worthy sacrifice for sins. The innocent animals slain in the Old Testament days 'atoned' or 'covered over' sins in that they pointed forward to the coming of Jesus Christ as the "Lamb of God" (John 1:29, 36). This is why the Bible clearly teaches the virgin birth of Christ. The virgin birth of Christ is a vital truth to grasp; that the birth of Jesus Christ was not the result of sexual relations between Joseph and Mary. Mary was a virgin and the conception was by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:20). Therefore, although the Saviour was truly man - body, soul and spirit, He did not possess Adam's fallen, sinful nature. Whilst all Christians believe that Jesus Christ never sinned, perhaps fewer realise that it was impossible for Him to sin!

2. The Bible also teaches a clear distinction between 'sin' and 'sins'

This may appear to be 'splitting hairs' - but it is not. Sin is the root - sins are the fruit; sin is the cause - sins are the effect; sin is condemned - sins are forgiven. We must understand this distinction if we are to avoid what sadly many appear to preach - universal salvation.

At the cross of Calvary the Lord Jesus Christ, the perfect, sinless one, gave a very full answer to a Holy God in relation to the question of sin - the root, and in a day to come, God will bless the whole of creation, on the basis that sin has been dealt with. This is the truth of 'propitiation'. In His death, the Lord Jesus Christ also made it possible that God could, righteously, forgive sins. How can this be? He who knew no sin, (2 Corinthians 5:21) - who did no sin, (1 Peter 2:22) and in whom sin was not, (1 John 3:5), "bare our sins in His own body on the tree", 1 Peter 2:24. This is the truth of 'substitution'. Returning to Psalm 51:4, we learn another striking thing; our sins (although they undoubtedly affect others) are in essence against God. Each sin we commit is a sin against a Holy God and must be answered for.

3. The Bible clearly teaches that Christ is the only Sin-Forgiver.

Unless we come individually to Christ to have our sins forgiven we cannot claim to be in the family of God. The Apostle John writes, "But as many as received Him, to them gave He power (or authority) to become the children of God", John 1:12. So the Bible clearly teaches that the forgiveness of sins is an individual blessing and not a universal blessing. Sadly, too often we hear those who imply that because Christ died for the sin of the world all are forgiven. This is not the case. They fail to differentiate between Christ's work for sin and His work for sins. Let me say clearly that the work of Christ at Calvary means that all can be forgiven but it is only as we come individually to Him in repentance that we receive the forgiveness of our sins. In Revelation 20:11-15, we are left in no doubt that any that die 'in their sins', will be raised 'in their sins' and be judged 'in their sins'.

In Luke 7:36-50 the Lord Jesus is called "a friend of publicans and sinners", by the judgmental Pharisees. What was meant as a slur on Him was actually a wonderful testimony to His grace! The Lord Jesus had come not to call the righteous (that is the self-righteous) but sinners to repentance. He could differentiate between the sinner and their sins, and loved the sinner, whilst at the same time hating their sins. The Lord tells a parable to Simon the Pharisee in response to his attitude concerning this sinful woman. Let us read the verses together, and allow the word of God to speak directly to our hearts. Perhaps, if we are honest, there's a bit of "Simon the Pharisee" in each of us.

Now let us read Luke 7:36-50 together. "And one of the Pharisees desired Him that He would eat with him. And He went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, And stood at His feet behind Him weeping, and began to wash His feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee which had bidden Him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, 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. And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss My feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed My feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And He said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. And they that sat at meat with Him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? And He said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace".

What an instructive passage! We see Jesus in Simon's house - his guest of honour, but the murmurings of Simon reveal that he had no idea who he was entertaining. On the other hand, this sinful woman had come to Jesus, not deterred by the surroundings of the Pharisee's house, with a precious box of ointment. She washed the feet of the

Saviour with her tears, drying them with her hair, before anointing them with her ointment. What a rebuke for Simon, who had not given his guest the customary welcome he should have.

The Lord Jesus speaks to Simon. Two debtors, one owing five hundred pence and the other fifty. Both had nothing and could not pay their debt. Oh, this is the problem with so many self-righteous people today; they don't realise that they have nothing of any value to bring to God. They bring their works, their money, their religion - but what an affront to God! If anything we could do was acceptable to Him, why would He have sent His Son to face the horrors of Calvary? Only when we realise that we "have nothing to pay" (that is nothing with which to make payment), can God "frankly forgive". Simon would have been an educated, intelligent man and you would think he would understand what the Saviour was saying to him. Sadly it appears he did not, and whilst this sinful woman received the blessing, he was left muttering about whether Christ had any right to forgive sins also.

Listen again to the gracious words of the Saviour to that woman, "Thy sins are forgiven" (Luke 7:48). "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace" (Luke 7:50). This was individual forgiveness for this sinful woman and Jesus had every right to do this because He knew that her sins would be laid on Him when He was crucified on the cross.

Let us look now at Matthew 18:21-35. We don't have time to read all the verses together, but I trust you know the passage and encourage you to read it again later.

In Matthew 18:21 we read, "Then came Peter to Him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven".

Then in Matthew 18:23-35, Jesus told the parable of the wicked servant. We will read the first few verses together. "Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt" (Matthew 18:23-30).

This passage shows us the stark contrast between our attitude to forgiving others and the Saviour's attitude to forgiving us. Peter wanted to know if he should forgive someone who had sinned against him, up to seven times. I'm sure he was stunned by the answer given by the Lord, "until seventy times seven". In other words, there can be no limit on our forgivingness. Our forgiveness should be characterised by the forgiveness which we have received from Christ. Now, that's 'easier said than done', is it not?

It must be noted that the parable which Jesus gives is in relation to the 'kingdom of the heavens'. This being so, it would include all who profess to be Christian whether real or unreal. In Matthew 13:24-30 we read of the wheat and the tares, growing together until the harvest. In Matthew 25:1-13 we read of the five wise and the five foolish virgins. These are just two examples of the mixture which exists in the professing Church today. So it is that we have those who profess to be Christian but who are not real. Earlier in this Gospel, the Lord Jesus warns His disciples about those who are "wolves in sheep's clothing" (Matthew 7:15) and says, "by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:20).

The parable Jesus told in Matthew 18:23-35 shows the desperate plight of a servant who owed a huge amount of money. When it was obvious that he could not repay, he and his family were at the mercy of his lord and master. The master's heart was 'moved with compassion' and the servant was 'freed' and 'forgiven'. What wonderful mercy and grace was shown to this servant! What a picture of the full and free forgiveness we receive from Christ the Sin - Forgiver. Sadly that was not the end of the parable. This servant who had been shown so much mercy was merciless to his fellow servant who owed him but a fraction of what he had owed his lord. This wicked servant showed by his actions that he was completely unaffected by the mercy which had been shown to him. Therefore, his lord's anger was kindled against him and his punishment was very severe.

What is the lesson for us? Thank God that the forgiveness of our sins is not limited to the measure in which we forgive those who have sinned against us. Oh no! God's forgiveness is according to the measure of His grace. When God forgives our sins, He removes them as far as the East is from the West, and He chooses not to remember them - forever! They're gone! This is the basis of our peace with God. Our eternal salvation depends on Christ and His work on the cross of Calvary and we can add nothing to that finished work.

So what then can we learn from this parable? The lesson is that we should show the same forgiveness to others as we have received from Christ. John in his first epistle says, "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar", 1 John 4:20. In closing, let me quote the Apostle Paul's words to the Christians at Ephesus, "Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you", Ephesians 4:32.

May God grant us His grace that we might be able to show the forgiveness of the Incomparable Christ in our dealings with others.

May God bless you all.

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