

## **The Gospel of Jesus Christ**

### **An accessible Saviour**

### **Luke 7:34-39**

*[Please note: sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.  
The English Standard James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

#### **Recap of T1213**

Last week my colleague, Peter Ollerhead, spoke on 'The Purpose of the Saviour', as stated by the Lord Jesus Christ himself in Luke 5:32:

"I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

Peter also mentioned the apostle Paul's expansion and explanation of the reason the Saviour came from heaven:

"The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost" (1Timothy 1:15).

"God our Saviour...desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all" (1Timothy 2:3-7).

#### **Introduction**

The question which could reasonably be asked about such statements of Gospel truth is, "Is Jesus Christ accessible to **all** people, regardless of who they are or what sins they have committed?" My talk today answers that query. It's based on the incident in Simon the Pharisee's house recorded in Luke 7:34-39, which I will now read from the English Standard Version (Jesus is speaking):

““The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is justified by all her children.” One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.””

## The Incident

Luke's the only Gospel writer who records this woman's encounter with the Saviour. Luke's Gospel isn't set out in a chronological order, but rather in a spiritual order. Hence the incident connects with what Jesus had been saying in vv.29-33 about the contrasting reactions by the religious leaders to John the Baptist's ministry versus the Lord's. I'm sure that every listener today will appreciate why this "woman in the [city] who was a notorious sinner" (Luke 7:37, Weymouth). was classed as a sinner! Even in today's liberal society, she would be called a prostitute! The good news of the Gospel is that Jesus "receives sinners" (Luke 15:2).

That also means that He's accessible to them; and this incident, of this woman coming into His presence, illustrates this truth of the Gospel message. I've always thought it was surprising that she, such a notorious sinner, could get into a Pharisee's house without any difficulty. In my ignorance, I was under the impression that one of the servants would be charged with the responsibility of ensuring that only invited guests were allowed in. However, I discovered, in my studies for this talk (p.993, *IVP New Bible Commentary*, IVP, England, 1994 & Vincent's Word Studies), that it wasn't uncommon for uninvited guests to be found, unchallenged, at banquets in the side-seats behind the guests. That was the custom of the day. But I'm still surprised that these self-righteous Pharisees, who took such pains to distance themselves from everything and everyone they considered to be sinful, didn't have a check on who was entering their homes. Or perhaps it was that on this occasion Simon was so distracted with scrutinising his special Guest that even such a notorious sinner could slip in unnoticed?

The Lord Jesus was so accessible to her that she was able to come up behind Him and touch Him. He was reclining at Simon's table, with His feet partly behind Him. As she approached, she was crying, and she began to wash His feet with her tears. Then she dried them with her hair before anointing them with the anointment she'd brought. Her actions may have been unseemly to everyone else in the room, but she only wanted to express her deep appreciation to the Saviour, who'd forgiven her.

## Commentary

In His commentary, Matthew Henry (Matthew Henry commentary [www.eSword.net](http://www.eSword.net)) made these four comments about her actions:

- 1) That they showed her deep humiliation for her sins. She stood behind the Lord Jesus weeping. Sometime previous she had heard the Gospel from Him. She'd repented of her horrendous sins and placed her faith in Christ. Her tears represented that repentance but also the subsequent joy that salvation had brought her.
- 2) She honoured the Lord Jesus by taking her place at His feet and wiping away her tears with her hair, that which spoke of her personal glory (1 Cor. 11:15).
- 3) She openly displayed strong affection for the Lord Jesus, which He took special notice of - that "she loved much" (Luke 7:42 & 47). She expressed her affection by kissing His feet.
- 4) By anointing His feet with ointment, she was effectively owning Him to be the promised Messiah. (On another occasion, Mary of Bethany anointed the feet of Jesus:

"Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ... Then Jesus said, "Leave her alone, she [intended to keep it] for the day of my burial" (John 12:3 with alternative rendering of v.7))

When Simon saw that the Lord Jesus had allowed the woman to approach and even touch Him, it confirmed what he (Simon) had thought all along - that Jesus wasn't a prophet after all. "Had He been a prophet", Simon said to himself, "Jesus would have realised that by touching the woman, he would have become 'unclean'." But then Simon got the shock of his life – Jesus answered these unspoken musings, and spoke directly to him. Jesus told him a parable of two debtors, neither of whom could pay the creditor. To their total relief, this creditor freely forgave both their debts. Jesus explained the large debtor pictured the woman. She'd shown her appreciation of the Person, who'd forgiven her her many sins, by this outpouring of her love on the Saviour. By the time Simon did get the message of the parable, it was too late. He had dropped himself in by effectively admitting that he was the lesser debtor, who was every bit in need of forgiveness as the woman. That was something the proud Pharisees would never admit to! They trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt (Luke 18:9). However, if Simon had really grasped the significance of what Jesus meant by the parable, as the lesser sinner, he'd have asked the Lord for forgiveness too. And perhaps this is the point in my talk where I can justifiably paraphrase 5:32, the verse quoted at the beginning of this talk - the Lord's explanation of why He had come into the world:

"I have not come to call the self-righteous, such as the Pharisees, but sinners to repentance."

As Peter Ollerhead said in last week's talk, no matter how much we try to be good, or even think that we're good, by God's reckoning we're all sinners, who all are in need of the redemption that's available in Christ Jesus. The Scripture states:

"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [but all who believe] are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:23-24).

It was true in Jesus' day. It was true in Paul's day. It remains true in our day. There's no other way of salvation!

## **The Forgiveness of sins**

The public announcement made by the Lord Jesus to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven" sent shockwaves through all of Simon's guests. The table conversation buzzed with the question, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" (Luke 7:49). On a previous occasion, He'd said to the paralytic man, "...your sins are forgiven you." That announcement also caused an adverse reaction from the scribes and the Pharisees. They arrogantly raised the question, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Luke 5:20-21). Jesus answered them that it was He, the Son of Man, who had authority on earth to forgive sins (Luke 5:24). Here in ch.7, He was only concerned that the woman might have the assurance of salvation. Ignoring the discussion around the table, He spoke words of comfort directly to her, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (Luke 7:50). Her witness to the saving power of the Lord Jesus didn't penetrate the hardened hearts of anyone else in Simon's house that day. Not even Simon, to whom the Lord had demonstrated himself to be much more than a prophet!

The question which arises from our considerations today is, "Is the Lord Jesus still an accessible Saviour to people in the twenty-first century?" The answer is a resounding "Yes, He is!" -even though He isn't physically present on earth. After He died and rose again from among the dead, God glorified Him and seated Him on His throne in heaven to be the Saviour for the world of lost sinners (Acts 5:31). God also made Him both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:32-36). Moreover:

“...there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

That means, whoever you are (your ethnicity), and wherever you are (your nationality) salvation is available to you by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ:

“For there is no distinction between [people]; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved”” (Rom. 10:12-13).

Some may think that He’s too far away in heaven for anyone to gain access to Him, but the truth is that He’s near to everyone, whether they’re conscious of Him or not. Paul preached to the Athenians that people,

“...should seek God...[to] find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for “In him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:27-28).

Individually, we (like the woman of Luke 7) must come to the Saviour remembering that,

“...without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Hebrews 11:6).

‘The Light of the World’, William Holman Hunt’s painting, is often used as an illustration of these Gospel truths. It represents the figure of the Lord Jesus continually knocking on an overgrown and long-unopened door, derived from Revelation 3:20 (Darby translation):

“Behold, I stand at the door and am knocking; if any one hear my voice and open the door, I will come in unto him and sup with him, and he with me.”

The door in the painting has no handle, and therefore can only be opened from the inside. It represents “the obstinately shut mind” (William Holman Hunt’s comment on his painting) - just like Simon the Pharisee’s. The problem then isn’t His inaccessibility, but a person’s resistance to His call when they hear the Gospel message. According to Hunt, he painted the picture with what he thought, unworthy though he was, to be the divine command. It’s a fundamental issue, you’re commanded, not requested, to come to God through Jesus Christ, His Son. When Paul preached to the Athenians, he also said:

“The times of [men’s] ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by [that] man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:30-31).

In his exposition of the Gospel, Paul bracketed his teaching with the fact that God commands obedience to it. He wrote that his apostolic responsibilities were to bring about the obedience of faith from all peoples in the world for the sake of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ; and that this obedience was according to the command of the eternal God (see Romans. 1:5 with 16:26). I’m concerned that, in our generation, we Christian believers, including Gospel preachers, use biblical language when witnessing to the Lord Jesus. Emphasis must be given to the necessity for people to repent of their sins and obey the divine command to place their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. That’s what Paul did, when he preached the Gospel. He earnestly testified of these requirements, of **repentance** toward God and **faith** toward our Lord Jesus Christ (see Acts 20:21). It’s so easy for people to claim to have some kind of “faith” and/or have had a religious experience,

without these two essentials, which lead to salvation. There are some who would say they're 'Christians' yet have no clear idea what it means to be saved.

## **How to receive Salvation**

This brings me to my final comments about how each one of us can personally find Jesus Christ to be an accessible Saviour and Lord. Late last year, talk T1177, entitled 'The ABC Gospel', explaining some of the fundamental facts of the Gospel, was broadcast. Well, here are some fundamental steps each one of us needs to take to be saved:

Step 1. Confession of sin. Like the sinful woman in Luke 7, we each must acknowledge that we're sinners in the sight of a holy and righteous God. In today's world sinning, at best, is seen to be what some other person does to another to harm them. It's rarely personalised to admit, "I'm a sinner"; nor is it recognised that sin is primarily offensive to God and trespasses His law. Quite often, what God defines as evil, mankind now calls good; and vice-versa. In 1990, the company I worked for had its quality management systems assessed to ensure that they complied with a British Standard. At the final meeting, when the assessors presented their verdict, one of them verbally presented a 'non-compliance', that is, something he'd observed happening in the warehouse which didn't meet the standard. He said that a warehouse operative was a sinner because he'd failed to follow one of the company's procedures. Since I was the company's quality manager, I had to formally accept or reject the assessor's finding. I said that I would only accept his finding if he personally would acknowledge that he also was a sinner because that's what God stated about everyone in the Bible. That caused quite a stir in the meeting. The assessor wasn't willing to do that and so he quickly changed what he'd said to remove any reference to anyone being a sinner. And I got the thumbs-up from my corporate boss who was standing behind the assessor. Being a Christian, she appreciated my boldness in witnessing to the Gospel in such a formal setting as well as having brought the assessor into line. Step 1 then is about confessing to God that I'm a sinner. David said:

"For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment" (Psalm 51:3-4).

Step 2. Repentance. By her tears, the woman of Luke 7 showed that she'd repented of her sins. She was truly sorry for the wrongs she'd committed and the sinful life she'd lived. Repentance is that changed state of mind which comes to abhor sin in the same way as God does and turns from practising it. Psalm 51, just quoted, is very much a description of repentance in action - a changed attitude towards sin. The Holy Spirit's work is to bring about this conviction of sin (John 16:8-9). He then produces that mind-set within the believer not to serve sin (Romans 6:6, 12-13, 20-23).

Before I move on to Step 3, please notice how essential Steps 1 & 2 are before we can be saved. The Lord Jesus said that unless people repent, they'll perish, that is, they'll end up in hell (Luke 13:3 & 5 with 16:20-31). God willing, next week's talk is based on Luke 15, which twice highlights the fact that heaven rejoices over repentant sinners, who otherwise would be eternally lost (Luke 15:7 & 10). And I would also boldly say that unless you confess your sins and repent of them, you'll find the Saviour is inaccessible. He won't receive you any other way!

Step 3. Belief. The woman of Luke 7 was saved by her faith. She heard the Lord's call to repent and to place her trust in Him for salvation. She also heard His message of forgiveness. Likewise, we each, as individuals, must believe in Jesus Christ and trust in God's word - that Jesus our Lord was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification (see Romans 4:24-25). As Paul and Silas told the Philippian jailor:

"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).

Step 4. Acknowledgement of Jesus as Lord. The woman of Luke 7 came publicly to the feet of the Lord Jesus and symbolically owned Him as both her Saviour and her Lord. In Romans 10, Paul explains how the Gospel works:

“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved” (Romans 10:9-10).

And baptism is another way by which Christian believers commit themselves to live under the Lordship of Christ (see Romans 6).

Step 5. Don't delay! Take these steps now!

“Behold, now is the favourable time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2).

“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:6-7).

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk, number T1214, entitled ‘An Accessible Saviour’ in our ‘Gospel of Jesus Christ’ series.

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