

CHRIST CAME TO SAVE SINNERS...LIKE ME!

I am going to begin my lesson this morning with the following statement, which I believe is absolutely true: *“Unless we see ourselves as sinners fully deserving the wrath of God, there is a good chance we will not see ourselves as sinners in need of the grace of God.”*

Please open your Bibles to **1 Timothy 1**, and read with me **begin reading in verse 12**:

“I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, 13) though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, 14) and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 15) 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. 16) But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. 17) To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”

If you are like me, it is simply remarkable that Paul wrote this and said this about himself? Did you notice there in verse 15 what Paul calls himself? Depending on which version you are using, he is either the “foremost” or the “chief” or the “worst” of sinners. We may read that and wonder why Paul would say that? It is hard for us to take his words literally. After all, other than Christ himself, many people think of Paul as being the most faithful, godly and devoted man who ever lived. How could he be the chief of sinners?

Many times when people read that, they immediately assume that Paul was referring to the days when he had been a persecutor of the saints; that he was still sensitive to that wicked time in his life. But that isn't what he was saying. He did say in verse 13, that formerly he had been a blasphemer, persecutor and insolent opponent, but that was in the past. Notice Paul did not say that at one time he was the foremost sinner in the world. He did not say, “I use to be the chief!” He said, “I am the chief” or foremost sinner of all. How could Paul think of himself and describe himself in that way? Was he saying that he was still engaged in more sinful things than any other person? No, I don't believe that for a minute; that wasn't what he was saying. I don't think Paul was boasting that he was the worst sinner of all time. Well, what was he saying?

Essentially Paul was saying that of all the sinners Christ had come to save, he was a prototype. He was saying that Christ was using him to show the rest of the world that Christ saves sinners. Sinners who because of their past thoughts, words and actions deserve nothing but the wrath of God; and sinners who because of their present thoughts, words and actions deserve nothing but the wrath of God. This is the guy, don't forget who wrote **Romans 3:23**: *“for all have sinned”*—past tense—*“and fall short”*—present tense—*“of the glory of God.”*

I think sometimes people who are Christians, who have obeyed the gospel, and are even conscientious about trying to live a faithful, godly life, lose sight of their sinfulness. They are like that Pharisee in the parable Jesus told, related to us by **Luke in chapter 18. Verse 9** says, *“He—that is, Jesus—**told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt.**”* He then went on to tell about two men who went into the temple to pray. The one was a Pharisee and the other tax-collector. Now, I know that for most of us reading the New Testament today, we automatically assume that is a guy is a Pharisee, that he is a sinner. We associate that word with those who maybe more than any other group, opposed Jesus. But we need to understand that a Pharisee in Christ’s time was an individual who tried hard to live by the Law of Moses. He was someone who was zealous for the Law. He was fastidious about keeping himself pure and ceremonially clean at all times. He was careful about what he ate, drank and touched. He was particular about the type of people he would be seen with. Remember, the apostle Paul had been a Pharisee according to Philippians 3:5.

So a Pharisee was someone who was a straight arrow; he was holy and devout, and generally, very pious. But that kind of mindset and lifestyle also came with a danger, and it is a danger that we Christians face today. That is the danger of losing sight that we are still sinners in need of the grace of God. As I have been teaching my Wednesday night class, *“If we do not see ourselves as sinners deserving the wrath of God, we may not see ourselves as sinners in need of the grace of God.”*

And so this Pharisee, the one in this parable Jesus told, as recorded in Luke 18, he goes into the temple and he prays and here’s how his prayer went: *“**God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get.**”*

There is another story involving Christ and a Pharisee, also related to us by brother **Luke, found in the 7th chapter, beginning about verse 36**. It is there that I would like to direct your attention and where we will find our lesson for this morning. Please open your Bibles to Luke 7, and begin reading with me in verse 36. We will read to the end of the chapter.

One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. 37) 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, 38) 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. 39) 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."

40) And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher." 41) "A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed

five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42) When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" 43) Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." 44) Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45) You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. 46) You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. 47) Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven--for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." 48) And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." 49) Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" 50) And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Now, there are some very interesting aspects to this story.

First of all, one has to wonder why this Pharisee extended this invitation to Jesus. Now, while there were exceptions, such a Nicodemus as mentioned in John 3 and 19, many, if not most of the Pharisees were not friendly towards Jesus. If you read the 23rd chapter of Matthew, it is not hard to understand why. Jesus was hard on them. In that chapter he peels the hide off of them, along with the scribes, and calls them hypocrites, which if memory serves me correctly, is not one of the things that Norman Vincent Peale says to do in order to "win friends and influence people."

Earlier in **Luke 7, verse 30**, we are told, "*but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by John.*"

So, was this Pharisee more like Nicodemus, someone who was not far from the kingdom, who was trying to learn the truth, leaning towards the idea that Jesus was the Messiah? Or did he have other motives in inviting Jesus to his home? From what happened it would appear that was the case.

And you have to wonder also why Jesus accepted the invitation. Surely, knowing what is in men's hearts, Jesus would have known what was going on. Why did he allow himself to be put in that position?

And you have to wonder also, what prompted the woman in this story to show up. First of all, she would not have been welcome. She would not have been one of those who had been invited. First of all, she is a woman, and this was a meeting of men, no doubt. Secondly, as verse 37 tells us, "*she was a woman of the city, who was a sinner.*" Now that may or may not mean what we think it is saying, but many commentators suggest that the woman was a harlot.

And you also have to wonder what Jesus must have thought as this woman came near to where he was and bowing low at his feet—that would have been stretched out away from the table—

she began to wet his feet with her tears, wiping them with her hair and then anointing them with the perfumed oil that was in the alabaster box.

Verse 39 says that when the Pharisee who had invited Jesus into his home saw this, as he watched what was happening, 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.”* Now, he didn’t say those things to anyone, he just thought those things. We do that all the time, don’t we, we think things that we don’t say? We need to remember, Romans 2:16 says that one day God is going to judge the secrets of men; those things that have played out in their hearts.

I love **verse 40**, and all versions render this the same way, *“And Jesus answering said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.”* Had the Pharisee said something to Jesus? No, he had only thought those things within himself. And yet we need to know our thoughts are like an open conversation to God. All of those things you have been thinking about this morning since we began this time of worship. Do you think God wasn’t aware of all that?

Think about it dear friends!

Then Jesus told about a moneylender and two debtors. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other owed him fifty. Now a denarii was the equivalent of a day’s wage, so in the one case, it was about two months salary, which was no small amount itself; and the other owed about a year and a half of wages. Jesus said they could not repay their loan, and so the moneylender just forgave both of them. So Jesus’ question is, *“Which of them will love him more?”* And the Pharisee says, *“The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.”* That just goes to show you that even dumb people can be right once in a while!

Verse 44 tells us that Jesus then turned toward the woman at his feet, and he says to the Pharisee, *“Do you see this woman?”* (that would have been rather obvious) *“I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss (which was the usual form of greeting, showing love and welcome at the same time), but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much, but he who is forgiven little, loves little.”*

Oh there was a sinner in the room all right that day but it wasn’t just the woman of the city that had come in. The room was full of sinners, every one of them in desperate need of God’s mercy and forgiveness. How about the room we are in this morning? Do you think there are any sinners here who need forgiveness?

Simon, the Pharisee, was right when he thought to himself, *“If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman”* it was who was touching him. Jesus was a prophet, and he knew not only everything about the woman who was at his feet, but also everything about the man who had invited him to have this dinner with him.

And why did Christ accept the Pharisee's invitation? Did he go there in order to show Simon to be the hypocrite that he was? Or did he go there because he loved Simon every bit as much as he loved the woman at his feet? Think about it brethren?

Verse 48 says, "*And he said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.'*" Oh my! What sweeter, more glorious words could you ever hope to hear! If you have obeyed the gospel, and you truly repented of your sins, the Bible says, the angels of heaven rejoice more over one sinner who repents than ninety-nine who need no repentance. Are there ninety-nine people anywhere who do not need to repent? No, but there are ninety-nine people who may not be aware of their need for repentance. Why? Because, like the Pharisee, they do not see themselves as sinners.

Isn't it interesting that **verse 49** says, "*Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves—if I may paraphrase just a bit—'did you hear what he said!'*" They were shocked and their hardened, evil hearts immediately began to fault Jesus for saying something so blasphemous! In their mind, only God could forgive sins. They had not got anything from the object lesson that had played out in front of them. They didn't see any need to rejoice for this woman who had humbled herself and received the forgiveness of her sins. They didn't get the point that Jesus made to Simon. They were just flabbergasted that anyone would say something like that. Reminds me of people who come to worship and go home being critical of one thing the preacher said, or upset because the service went overtime, instead of being thankful that they have had the privilege of being a part of the worship of God.

Let me ask you a question: What do you think we would get from our worship times together if we came more like that woman that day? But you see, if we have hearts and minds like Simon and those others who were present that day, and are so spiritually blind that we do not really see our own sinfulness, then we may not get much from the time we spend together singing God's praises, looking at His word, worshipping Him in the manner that He has asked us to do, or remembering the sacrifice made on our behalf. We might be in danger of seeing this time as our duty. We come in order to keep our card punched, or possibly because we are afraid that if we don't come, we might be lost. But what a difference it would make if we came because we know, and really believe, that Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners...like me!

Well, the lesson is yours. I don't have to belabor the point. You have either got it or you are not going to get it. But I will close with verse 50. Jesus said to the woman, "*Your faith has saved you; go in peace.*"

Will you leave here today with peace in your hearts because you know your sins have been forgiven, that God in His mercy has saved you because of your faith, or will you leave here mostly thinking about where you are going to go for dinner, or what was wrong with the service today; no peace, just agitation and frustration? It all depends, I believe, on whether or not you really understand that Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners, like me, or like those other folks!

If you know it was for sinners like you and if you have a need to take some action this morning, we are going to close with an invitation and a song. If you need to humble yourself before the Lord this morning, will you come while we stand and sing!