

Forgiven Much or Little

by Roy Hession

The sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing our need for forgiveness and how it transforms our love for Jesus and others.

Duration: 23:01

Scripture: Numbers 14:19-20, Matthew 18:21-35, Luke 4:25-27, Luke 7:36-39, Luke 7:47, Ephesians 4:32

Topics: "Forgiveness"

Description

In this sermon, Jesus tells a parable to Simon about a creditor who had two debtors. One debtor owed five hundred pence, while the other owed fifty. When they both couldn't pay, the creditor forgave them both. Jesus then asks Simon which debtor would love the creditor more, and Simon correctly answers that it would be the one who was forgiven more. Jesus then points out the actions of a woman who had washed his feet with her tears and hair, contrasting it with Simon's lack of hospitality. The sermon emphasizes the division between those who have been forgiven little and those who have been forgiven much, and suggests that God's grace leads us from being forgiven little to being forgiven much. The sermon also highlights the importance of recognizing our need for forgiveness and expressing love and gratitude towards Jesus.

Transcript

I feel, on occasion like this, one only really needs, perhaps to indicate, as one sees it, the direction in which the Holy Spirit is likely to lead us in these days. It's a good thing if we really have some understanding of the direction. Otherwise you may be expecting one thing, and all the way through you may find that he's leading you in another direction from what you expect.

Now I'm going to turn you to a familiar passage, Luke chapter 7, verse 36. 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 meet.

And behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meet 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 ointment. And 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 that was quite a sum.

Pence meant something different from what it means to us. 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. Therefore, this is what it really means, not for, therefore she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same love is little.

The verse I want to bring to you is that last one. Her sins, which are many, are forgiven. Therefore, she loved much.

And that was evidenced in the way she treated the Lord Jesus. But to whom little is forgiven, like you Simon, the same love is little. And that has been evidenced in your attitude to me.

It seems to me, from that passage, that there are two sorts of Christians. Two classes of Christians. The one class is the class who is forgiven little, represented by Simon the Pharisee.

And the other class of Christians is the one to whom, who is forgiven much, as represented by this woman. Just two classes. Those who are forgiven little, and those who are forgiven much.

And if there's a division in our meeting, it's simply that division. Those who've been forgiven little, those who've been forgiven much. And I believe the direction in which God's going to lead us is simply this.

He's going to lead those who've been forgiven little to be forgiven much. I don't think your halo is going to grow as a result of being here. I don't think you're going to feel you've attained new goals.

It's going to be a very simple progress. Simply the progress from being forgiven only a little to being forgiven much. And if you already feel you've been forgiven much, then the progress for you is going to be from being forgiven much to being forgiven more.

Now, which class of person do you think is most acceptable to God? Or if you like, to use an awkward phrase, which class of person is the better Christian? The one who's been forgiven little, or the one who's been forgiven much? If you asked an ordinary man of the world, I know the answer that he would give. And I believe many of us, if we didn't think deeply, would give the same answer. Why, obviously, the one who is most acceptable to God is the one who's been forgiven little.

He hasn't done so much sin. He hasn't kicked over the traces. He's walked very largely in the straight and narrow way.

Since his conversion, he's been a consistent Christian. His life hasn't been marked with much failure. Therefore, in the nature of the case, he only needs to be forgiven a little.

And obviously, says somebody, that man is infinitely preferred to the one whose sins are many, and who's been forgiven much. But not so with God. In the school of grace, everything is upside down.

The bottom is in the top, and the back is in the front. God is standing on the ground of grace. And on that ground, he says, there is no difference for all of sin.

The idea that one is a better man than another doesn't come into it on the ground of grace. God says there's no difference. The whole lot are a bunch of failures and sinners.

And that goes for converted persons, as well as for unconverted persons. But there is a difference on the ground of grace. But it's not the difference between much sin and little sin.

It's simply the difference between the forgiven and the unforgiven. And amongst the forgiven, the further distinction between the forgiven, those who've been forgiven little, and those who've been forgiven much. God judges you and me on, by entirely different norms from which the world would normally judge men.

He's not looking at your consistencies or inconsistencies, firstly. The final thing is, are you forgiven little? Or are you forgiven much? You might be perhaps forgiven not at all. But what the things are is not so important.

For he says there is no difference. I mean the man at the top of the Himalayas is virtually no nearer at all to the stars than the man at the bottom of the coal pit. They're infinitely far away.

There's no difference for all of sin. But the difference is, how do we stand with regard to the forgiveness of God and our sins? Are we forgiven at all? Yes, you say. Well, alright then.

Are you a man who's only been forgiven a little? Or are you a man who's been forgiven much? And those that are acceptable to God over which He joys and finds infinite delight are those who have been forgiven much. Oh, if we're going to use that word better Christian, they are the better Christians of God's season. Look in the story.

The man who was forgiven little. Because he didn't think he was very bad and had little to be forgiven, he found no debt of love in his heart to Jesus. And he manifested it by his attitude and behaviour toward Jesus.

He gave him not even the ordinary common courtesy of someone to wash his feet and to anoint his head. Being forgiven little, he loved little. And I wonder what his relationship would be to other people.

I wouldn't like to cross Simon the Pharisee. He wouldn't make allowances. He'd be quick to condemn, quick to blame, and insist on his pound of flesh.

You see, being forgiven little himself, he would forgive others only a little. And I want to tell you, the Christian who only sees himself as forgiven little is going to be a Christian who loves Jesus little. In the nature of the case, he's obligated to the Lord Jesus to a less extent.

There's no debt of love to the man who's forgiven a little, the consistent Christian, the one who's always been victorious, who never needs to repent, can't understand Christians repenting. He's had such a victorious life, my dear friend, I want to tell you. In ways that you perhaps will hardly realise, you manifest the fact.

You love him little because you've been forgiven little. And I believe such and one because he's been forgiven so little will forgive others little. And that man cannot but be an unforgiving man to others.

He's not a melted man. He won't make allowances for others. He'd be hard and sensuous to others, as if he's so right and they're so wrong.

This is characteristic of us when we see ourselves as good Christians who've only needed to be forgiven a little. But what about those whose sins are many and who've been forgiven much? Why? Because they've been forgiven much. They love much.

This prostitute of the street. Morally you would think inferior to Simon. But she's been forgiven a lot and she loved much.

That what she couldn't do enough for Jesus and yet she was so humble about it. You notice she never got any higher than his feet. She kissed his feet.

She washed his feet. She anointed his feet. She didn't dare to anoint his head.

There was a sweet humility about this woman. She'd been forgiven much and she loved much. And when we see ourselves as having been forgiven much and know it is and can tell where we've been forgiven there'll be a love for Jesus we never knew before and that'll be manifested.

These are the people whose prayers make your heart melt. These are the people whose praises rarely reach heaven. Being forgiven much.

They love much. And their attitude to others. Unless they forget how much they've been forgiven and we can all do that.

They forgive others. Who am I to take umbrage at that when I've done so much else? How melty. How loving.

How quick to forgive and quick to repent of any reactions of resentment of a wrong done to them. These people are you see they've been forgiven much and therefore there's every motive for them to forgive others much. It is the much forgiven over whom God's delight.

Which cast do you think you're in? I mean you must compare yourself with a prostitute. Has she been forgiven more than you? I think she has. How blind we can be.

No, no. The two classes. But you see does this mean that the outrageous sinner has an advantage over the respectable Christian? Yes.

Sometimes it means exactly that. Yet an outrageous sinner who has been gloriously converted to God there's more grace about him than the Christian who's never been an outrageous sinner. Sometimes the outrageous sinner has an advantage.

The advantage is simply this. It shows how wonderful the grace of God is that a man's failures could even be made an advantage to him. That being forgiven them he loves so much more.

And the other great thing about it is that if this is so it humbles the righteous. And God is always out to humble the righteous. It was the younger son who had the big welcome not the older son to humble the

older son.

And grace always has a negative action rather than a positive. In reaching down to the unworthy it passes by those who think they're alright. That was why they opposed the Lord Jesus.

When did they take him to the brow and want to throw him over the hill? When he said there were many lepers in Israel in the days of Elijah. But to none of them none of them was healed except the Gentiles. And grace in reaching down to the unprivileged passed by the privileged.

And they didn't like it. But grace always does that. And the grace of God reaching down to the needy always humbles us who don't feel ourselves to be needy.

This is part of the whole business. And it is true that very often the outrageous sinner has an advantage over the one who's not been an outrageous sinner. But not necessarily so.

Because that sinner can forget how much he's been forgiven. The man in the story that Jesus told did been forgiven that vast debt and yet he took another servant by the throat who owed him a trifling sum. There's always an advantage if he forgets.

Then do you mean to say that to have lived a respectable good life is a disadvantage in the school of grace? Yes, sometimes it is a disadvantage. If it blinds you to how you really look before God it were better not to have had that excellent, wonderful life if it makes you a Pharisee. If it blinds you to what you are because sin isn't what we do it's what we are.

And the man who lusts and plays with impurity is as bad as a prostitute who's actually doing it. Isn't a fig to choose between us? The only reason the man, and we're all in it I'm guilty of these things as much as anybody else sometimes the man will play with it in his mind he'd actually do the deed were he not held back by selfish motives afraid of the consequences or his reputation or he lacks the opportunity. Why would he do it in his mind? He wouldn't do it in the deed.

But because his outward life would seem to be right it can blind him and therefore that outward life can be a disadvantage. But not necessarily so. He had wisdom to know that God doesn't look on the outward appearance but on the heart.

Very good to have an outward appearance that's all right as long as you know that that isn't enough. And that your heart is every bit as rotten in the sight of God as is the other person's. Do you know there's no need for any one of us to remain in the class of the little forgiven.

If Jesus as I hope he will I'm sure he will introduces us to ourselves in these days your sins, my sins will appear to rise up to heaven. But you'll see the grace of God is enough even today. And you'll find that it's all been anticipated ahead of time in the cross of Jesus in the blood and the fountain that's been opened for sin and uncleanness.

And we'll know what sinners we are. I believe that's one of the essential preludes to blessing. And in the school of grace it's the only way to grow in grace to grow in the apprehension of our sinfulness.

Then we see the grace that's adequate and the blood that cleanses of the Jesus who knows how to put wrong things right for us to restore all that sin has taken away. And so I would simply say this the direction in which grace would lead us is simply the direction from being forgiven little to being forgiven much. And

from being forgiven much to being forgiven more.

I've been forgiven today of some very wrong reaction to a certain situation What couldn't I do to that person if I knew who it was that did it? But Jesus didn't pray like that on the cross. I've been forgiven that. I've been forgiven many things at ever deeper levels.

And I believe that is growing in grace. Growing in grace doesn't mean you've got to grow in goodness but to grow in grace. Seeing how much you need the forgiveness of Jesus Christ that kindly hand of grace to reach a sinner again.

You're growing in grace. The story is told of George Beverley Shea and he went back to the town in Canada where he was brought up as a boy and he met the little lady who was his school teacher years before when he was a youngster. She said, Bev, I remember something about you.

He said, you know you've done something wrong and you're in some trouble and you know when a little boy you wrote me a little note saying I'm sorry I did that. Please forgive me. And you know Bev I've still got that little note of yours.

And the great big Bev Shea put his arm round the little woman and he said, bless you madam. I've been asking people to forgive me ever since. That's a gracious man.

You can get along with a man like that. And because a man is forgiven much he loves much. This is the secret of holiness.

Not some complicated theory of sanctification. It's the only motive God is counting on that because grace is extended because Jesus forgives what he convicts you of you begin to love him and when you love him you don't want to go on with things that dishonour him and you start putting things right being forgiven much. We love much.

I have already decided on the text I want put on my tombstone. I've told Pam unless she gets there before I do. It's a verse from Numbers forgiven from Egypt until now.

That's your testimony. Nothing more. Forgiven from Egypt until now.

And you won't have a bigger blessing as you go from Cleveland if you can say, ah he went there only forgiven a little I'm going forgiven much burdens gone the sun shining over my head Jesus precious and loving him and loving others that I never did before. And it's a simple secret in this lovely school of grace the centre of which is the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us pray.

Lord Jesus forgive us for thinking that we were we only needed to be forgiven a little. Forgive us our blindness for not seeing there's not a thing to choose between us and the very worst that men call worst. Forgive us for loving thee so little because we've been forgiven so little and Lord forgive us for these hard unforgiving attitudes to others.

Lord Jesus perhaps thou has got a lot of work to do in all of us. Begin it even tonight and may we know the comfort of those things that are upon our consciences being forgiven by thee washed and cleansed away. Lord Jesus maybe there's somebody who would give anything if they could only know it was forgiven who's been punishing themselves.

Lord Jesus speak thy word of grace for such. Show them what thou hast done for them on the cross. I hear the words of love I gaze upon the blood I see the mighty sacrifice and I have peace with God.

Lord Jesus may we move on in this direction in this lovely school of grace of thine. We ask it in thy dear name. Amen.

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