

JESUS' GRACE OF FORGIVENESS

Luke 7:36-50

Key Verse: 7:50

"Jesus said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.'"

Today's passage is a story about Jesus and two persons; one is Simon the Pharisee and the other a sinful woman. To the eyes of worldly people, Simon the Pharisee was the envy of all and the woman was the object of contempt. But to Jesus, the Pharisee was no good. And the sinful woman was good, because she knew Jesus' grace of forgiveness. Let's learn how we can receive the grace of forgiveness of sins.

First, she came to Jesus just as she was (36-37a).

Look at verse 36. "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." This verse tells us that a Pharisee invited Jesus to his house for dinner. Originally the Pharisees were a chosen people. 1 Peter 2:9 says, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." Therefore the Pharisees must have a clear mission as Bible teachers to the peoples of the whole world. They must have a high moral standard as a holy nation. They must suffer much and be persecuted to proclaim the word of God (Ro 3:1,2). They must suffer much to shepherd the flock of God's sheep. But when God blessed them, they completely forgot God's grace and lived in luxury. They also lived for pleasure like rich modern animal party men. Simon must have been a collector of celebrities to display his wealth and honor. This time, Simon the Pharisee invited Jesus to his home, because Jesus had been a man of question with great popularity among the rank and file. He was also very popular because of his oratory. In fact, in Jesus' time oratory was greatly honored as in the time of Socrates, Aristotle and Seneca. Probably the guests reclined at the table, and stewards were carrying out food to serve, and observers were there to watch their eating.

Out of nowhere, a woman broke in and surprised everybody. What kind of woman was she? As verse 37 says, she was a woman who had lived a sinful life. How was it that she was known to have lived a sinful life? In many novels, girls are portrayed as those who have beautiful dreams; some portrayed them as angels from heaven. One girl said with her shining eyes while driving, "When school starts, I want

to stay up late and study hard." Her heart was filled with joy. Obviously, she had many beautiful dreams to fulfill by studying hard. Likewise, this woman also must have been a woman of many beautiful dreams.

But, contrary to her wishes, she became a town prostitute. How could it be that she became a town prostitute? She must have had many reasons. It is a pitiful question to ask. If she were a sister of Lazarus, she might have done it to support her family. If she were Mary Magdalene, she might have done it to enjoy her sinful desire. There were many reasons why she became a town prostitute. But according to statistics, a prostitutes' counselor once said that 99% of them become prostitutes in order to satisfy their tempting curiosity and nagging sinful desire.

We cannot tell exactly why she became a town prostitute. But reality was that she was under the harassment of pimps. Once she thought that she could handle her life. Then the devil channelled in through her overly fantastic dreams and caused her to enjoy physical pleasure. After that, she was no more a flowery girl. Instead she was very sick with sin. Because she was sick with sin, she was depressed. Her depression caused her to become a town prostitute. People's insults, calling her, "You town prostitute," did not matter much to her. But her problem was the devil's torment; sometimes she felt that worms were eating in four corners of her head. She thought to herself, "I'd better commit suicide."

How did she come to Jesus? All the people in the Galilean district had heard that Jesus heals the sick and casts out evil spirits and preaches the good news of the kingdom of God. This good news was told even to this woman. One day, the woman learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house. It was a place she was not allowed to enter even as an observer, because only average people were allowed to come in and watch their eating. But something happened in her soul. As soon as the woman heard that Jesus heals the sick and preaches the kingdom of God, her sick soul rejoiced and felt she was healed. She felt she was wholesome. The name of Jesus healed her.

On the other hand, her interruption ruined the whole atmosphere of the banquet. To the guests, she was a despicable one. But she did not mind. Anyway, she came to Jesus as she was. Her coming to Jesus is comparable to the prodigal son's returning to his father. And Jesus is also comparable to the father who was waiting for his son's coming at the door every day until very late. Her coming just as she was to Jesus was a beautiful act of faith. We also must go to Jesus just as we are.

Second, she repented her sins with tears (37b,38).

When she came to Jesus as she was, she cried endlessly, standing behind him at his feet. It is the evidence that in spite of her sinful past, her conscience was not totally corrupt. As soon as she came to Jesus as she was, she was so thankful, believing that her sin was forgiven.

Mostly, wayward women are either spendthrifts or full of debts. But this woman had not squandered. She bought an alabaster jar of perfume with the money she earned through toiling. It may be that the alabaster jar of perfume was her hope of a happy marriage. The alabaster jar was an evidence that her soul was yearning for God. Moreover, she was full of thanks to Jesus who healed the sick. She brought an alabaster jar of perfume to give it to Jesus. What did she do with the alabaster jar of perfume? Look at verses 37b,38. "...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." In the past, the alabaster jar of perfume was everything to her. But now Jesus was everything. Most of all, her pouring out the perfume was her expression of repentance. For her perfume was the wages of her sins. At that time, her behavior was intolerable. But Jesus was not embarrassed. Rather, Jesus left her alone to pour out the jar of perfume on him. To the guests, Jesus, who was the main guest, looked greasy, too greasy. But Jesus was happy indeed to see her act of repentance with much crying.

Many people follow Jesus without repentance. But this woman humbly admitted that she was a sinful woman. She admitted that she was a corrupt and smelly sinner. She admitted that she was helpless because she was under the power of sin. When she came to Jesus, she cried endlessly and repented for her past sins. This reminds us of David's repentance. He committed adultery with the wife of one of his most loyal generals. Thus he sinned greatly against God. David wanted to solve his sin problem which tormented him day and night. So he wanted to give 500 bulls for the forgiveness of sins. But he knew that it wouldn't work. Finally he realized that he must come to God in repentance (Ps 51:16,17). And when he came to God his sin was forgiven.

How did Jesus accept her alabaster jar of perfume? Jesus accepted it very meaningfully in the gospel work. If we read Mark's gospel, we learn that Jesus received it as a part of gospel ministry. In Mark 14:8b,9, Jesus says, "She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her." Jesus also accepted it as her thanks for his grace of

forgiveness. Still, we wonder how her sinsickness was healed. It was the power of Jesus' name.

Third, Simon the Pharisee did not know God's grace (39-46).

Simon was very self-righteous. In his self-righteousness, he said in verse 39b, "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 knew what was on Simon's mind and said to him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "'Tell me, teacher,' he said" (40). Perhaps he expected some compliment on his elegant home and rich table, as others had done to him. But it was not. Jesus told him a story to teach the grace of forgiveness. Look at verses 41,42. "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled" (43). "You have judged correctly," Jesus answered. Jesus kept on speaking. Let's read verses 44-46. In this story, Jesus rebukes Simon the Pharisee's unthankful attitude toward God's grace of forgiveness. At the same time, Jesus admired the thankful heart of the woman who thanked God for the grace of forgiveness. Simon's attitude toward Jesus was that he was doing a favor to him. But he must grow spiritually and come to know God's grace of forgiveness.

Simon was rich. But he had no God in his heart. If we are the children of God, we must learn how to thank God. We can learn from Job in the Old Testament. Job was one of the richest men in his generation. But he knew God's sovereign rule. Once he was in trouble after losing all his children and his estate. Especially, he was troubled by his skin diseases. But he did not complain. Rather he thanked God for his sovereign rule. He said in Job 1:21, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised." Without a thankful heart, we cannot come to know Jesus' grace of forgiveness.

Biblically speaking, a debtor refers to a sinner. Simon did not know God. So he did not know that he was a sinner before God, like other Pharisees. There have been many people in history who thanked God for his grace of forgiveness of sin. St. Francis of Assisi was a man from a rich family. After meeting Jesus, he realized that he was a sinner. He left his palace and lived a pure and poor life, following the footsteps of Jesus. Once he was very sick due to malnutrition. One of his disciples brought him a cooked hen. He ate it up thoughtlessly. Then his conscience was stricken in the realization that he had eaten a hen when there was no record that

Jesus ate a hen. So he ordered one of his disciples to tie a rope around his neck and drag him in the street shouting, "This chicken-eater, this chicken-eater is a terrible sinner!"

St. Paul may be the best example in acknowledging that he was a sinner. He said, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst" (1Ti 1:15b). When Paul said it, he meant it. Paul thought that he did not deserve to live in this world anymore because he committed sins against God by persecuting the early Christians who were just sprouting for world salvation. Because of his sins he had no right to live in this world. He said, "But by the grace of God I am what I am..." (1Co 15:10a). The more he realized he was a sinner, the more he could realize the grace of God. So he loved Jesus more and more; he could love others more and more. But it was not he; it was the grace of God that was with him. Likewise, this woman also knew that she was a sinner who did not deserve Jesus' grace. God's grace was showered upon her. In response, she poured out her alabaster jar of perfume for the grace of forgiveness. But Simon the Pharisee did not thank God. He did not care about the needy. He was only busy with animal parties. To Jesus, Simon was a sinner who only enjoyed party life, not realizing God's great purpose for him.

Fourth, "your sins are forgiven; go in peace" (47-50).

Look at verse 47a. "Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven--for she loved much." Because of this woman, Jesus was greatly embarrassed at the banquet. Her act of repentance at the banquet looked too strange to tolerate, because she disturbed the whole banquet and the guests. To Jesus, her shameless act toward him was the very act of thanks for the grace of forgiveness. Jesus thought she deserved the best gift of God and said, "Your sins are forgiven." Sin made her sick with sins. Sin put her under the torment of the devil. But she is sick no more. She is no more in the devil's torment, because Jesus forgave her sins.

In the past, she was very unhappy because she was a slave of the devil. Now she is happy because she is freed from the power of sin. She is happy because she is freed from the poison of doubt of the devil. She is happy because Jesus accepted her from the state of a slave of sins and raised her to the state of a heavenly princess. When Jesus said, "Your sins are forgiven," Jesus carried her sins on the cross in order to give her the grace of forgiveness of sins. In addition, Jesus admired her faith. Look at verse 50. "Jesus said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.'" Jesus regarded her coming to him as an act of faith. Jesus regarded her endless crying as the expression of her repentance. Jesus regarded her anointing as her repentance and her thanks for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus was most pleased

by her.

"Jesus said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace'" (50). Until now what she really wanted was peace. But worldly peace gave her one trouble upon another. When Jesus said, "...go in peace," she felt as if she were flying in the air, coming nearer to the kingdom of God. When we study Romans we learn that the first result of faith is peace. When we believe in Jesus, God gives us his peace (Ro 5:1). When Jesus said, "Go in peace," it did not mean, "Be careful of a traffic accident." It meant: "I give you God's peace" (Jn 14:27). Now she was no more troubled because of her life of sin because Jesus gave her the peace of God which passes all human understanding.

In this passage we learn that we can receive the grace of forgiveness of sin when we repent of our sins like the woman. Then God gives us his grace of forgiveness. In addition, God gives us the peace of God that is the fountain of joy in our souls.