

Series: ***The Marks of A True Christian***

## He Who Has Been Forgiven Much, Forgives Much

The Mark: Forgiveness

Luke 7:36-49

### The True Is Marked by Forgiveness

Forgiveness is one of the marks of a true Christian. The true Christian has experienced forgiveness both inwardly & outwardly. Inwardly the true Christian has experienced forgiveness by God by having his own sins forgiven. Then because of that inner, transformational experience of personal forgiveness, the true Christian desires to share that his joy by expressing that same forgiveness outwardly to others who sin against him.

Having been forgiven, the true Christian is then able to grant forgiveness to others as a living demonstration to the reality of God's grace. The inner change expresses itself in outward ways.

### The Definition

Forgiveness is the removal of the obligation of repayment. Forgiveness is no longer be in a state of indebtedness. The Oxford English Dictionary defines forgiveness as 'to grant free pardon and to give up all claim on account of an offence or debt.'

### The Existence of the Debt

The very definition of the word entails a prior reality of indebtedness or being under obligation. Forgiveness gives testimony to the reality that something is owed. In order for forgiveness to be exercised, there must first be a debt or obligation to be repaid. Where there is no debtor, there can be no forgiveness.

When forgiveness is granted, the *obligation* to repay the debt is removed, but the debt, however, is not. Forgiveness is not the repayment of the debt. It is the pardon from personal responsibility of repayment. The debt must still be paid. Forgiveness simply releases a person from the responsibility or obligation to repay the debt.

### The Transfer of Responsibility

When forgiveness occurs, the debt is transferred to someone else. The debt must still be paid. If you are forgiven a debt it means that someone else besides you will incur the debt.

Imagine that you receive a call from your bank. The banker says, "You are late on your mortgage payment." You reply, "I know. I'm sorry but I don't have enough money to pay it." The banker then says, "Really, you don't have enough money? Well, just forget it. We'll take care of it. In fact, just so I don't have to make this kind of phone call again, we'll take care of the remainder of the mortgage. Consider it paid."

Who incurred the debt? The bank incurred the debt. The banker forgave you the debt. He removed your obligation to repay the mortgage. However, the debt did not disappear until the mortgage was actually paid. The bank then had to absorb the cost of the debt. When the lender released the debtor from responsibility to the debt, the lender himself then assumed the responsibility for the debt.

The only one, who can truly forgive a debt, is the one against whom the debt was originally incurred (or his legal representative). Since the bank enacted the mortgage in the first place by loaning the money, only the bank (or its legal representative), as the owner of the mortgage, can truly release the borrower from his promise of repayment.

### **My Neighbor Cannot Forgive My Mortgage**

If my neighbor called me and said, “I heard you’re late on your mortgage payment. I’ve decided that you no longer need to pay it. So, consider your mortgage paid.” That well-meaning neighbor is legally misguided. He has no legal authority to release you from the mortgage since it was not his money that purchased the mortgage in the first place. So the neighbor cannot grant true forgiveness of the debt since it was not his money that was advanced. Only my banker can truly forgive my mortgage debt.

### **The Parable of the Two Debtors (7:41-42)**

In the passage read this morning Jesus tells a parable about two debtors.

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.”*

We learn four things from this parable.

1. We are all debtors.
2. We are all unable to repay the debt.
3. God is the one to whom we are indebted.
4. Our debts can only be forgiven through faith in Jesus.

To see these points we need to go over the entire story.

### **Jesus Invited But Not Welcomed**

Jesus, the up and coming new rabbi, was invited to eat at the house of a Pharisee named Simon. This would be somewhat equivalent to us inviting a visiting preacher over for lunch after worship services. We might be tempted to think that Simon is a Pharisee who is responding positively to Jesus and His message since he invited him to join him for a meal. However, as we will see, this is not the case.

In traditional Middle Eastern meals such as this one, when a celebrated guest was invited, the doors were opened to the poor in the community. They would come in, sit along the outer walls and wait

quietly to receive the leftovers. This practice made the host look good in the eyes of all who were present.<sup>1</sup>

### **Hospitalities Refused**

Indeed, Simon has invited Jesus to eat with him, but *he did not welcomed Jesus at all*. We know this because he refused to extend any of the hospitalities that Middle Eastern hosts always offered their guests. This was not an accidental oversight. This was an intentional omission and it was painfully obvious. Jesus did not miss this fact and neither did any of the others who were in the room and there would have been many. Everyone would have noticed what the host did **NOT** do.

### **The Sinful City Woman**

One person in particular notices this fact. She is a woman from the city who is a sinner (7:37). She is almost universally assumed to be a prostitute. She had heard before hand that Jesus was going to be having a meal at the house of Simon the Pharisee's and she made up her mind to go and see Him.

This is amazing. She is a known sinner. Jesus is at the home of a Pharisee. Pharisees and sinners do not associate. Yet she decides that it is worth the risk, of the potential scorn and shame, to go and see Jesus. [We often pay a lot of money to see our favorite bands and travel great distances to hear our favorite speakers.] So off she goes to see Jesus.

### **She Had Already Heard, Believed, And Been Forgiven**

There is no doubt she has heard Jesus preach for she has already believed His message and been forgiven. She has heard Jesus preaching that God's grace is for all sinners who will repent and she has already believed and been forgiven. We know this from verses 47 and 48.

The verb 'forgiven' in verses 47 and 48 is in the perfect tense, which should be translated "have been forgiven." The perfect tense indicates a completed past action with continuing results. This lady's sins have **already** been forgiven. She has *already* repented and had her sins washed away. She is now coming to Jesus to express her love for Him.

So why is she weeping? She is standing behind Jesus weeping (7:38).

### **Jesus' Dirty Feet**

Jesus is reclining at the low table leaning in with His feet facing away from the table. The feet were always kept far away from the table since they were considered to be unclean. The streets of the day were filled with garbage, refuse, and sewage. They were unlike our streets today. So when you walked into someone's home, washing the feet was a given.

Water and olive oil were always offered to guests to wash with. Olive oil was the soap of the first century.<sup>2</sup> Every home had it (and still does to this day).<sup>3</sup> Simon had oil and water in his house, but he did **not** offer any to Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), p. 246 footnote 15.

<sup>2</sup> Bailey, p. 242.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 243.

This woman is standing behind Jesus at His feet. No doubt she is looking down and sees His dirty feet – the sign of an unwelcomed guest. Did she look down at her own dirty feet? Jesus was not offered any water, or oil, not even the traditional kiss of greeting. Jesus was obviously not welcomed in that house.

I wonder, had this sinful city lady had ever experienced this? Had she ever been invited to a dinner party only to become the object of public scorn and ridicule? Had she ever gone into a room thinking she was welcome only to publically discover that she was not?

Here is Jesus, the personification of God's grace, the one who eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners,<sup>4</sup> the one who came not for the righteous but for sinners, the man who preached a message of hope and forgiveness that changed this lady's life, the one rabbi in all Israel who would reject no one (who came to Him) and here He is being publically rejected and openly humiliated in the home of this Pharisee.

And yet Jesus sits there. He stays. He does not get up and leave. He accepts their rejection and bears it. He is an unwelcomed guest and yet He remains.

This woman has witnessed the public humiliation of one person in the room she knows does not deserve this kind of treatment. It is more than she can bear. She begins to weep. If there is anyone in this room who should be honored, it's Jesus and Simon has treated Him worse than a servant.

### **It Rains Heart-Water**

She weeps. Not just a tear or two, she begins to sob. The Greek word used is *brecho* and it means 'to rain.' The text literally says, 'and she begins to be raining on the feet of Him.' This lady is full of emotion. Simon gave Jesus no water for his feet. She would give Him of her own. Martin Luther called her tears 'heart water.' Her heart is so filled with love toward Jesus that her tears cannot be contained as she witnesses Him being publically dishonored.

### **A Towel of Hair**

She then lets down her hair and wipes her tears from off Jesus' feet. Simon dishonored Him by refusing to offer him a towel. She would honor Him by offering her hair.

This was a scandalous act. Unbinding the hair in public was listed in the Mishnah among the justifiable grounds for divorce. This was so offensive that not only was it grounds for divorce, it was grounds for divorce that included absolving the husband of any obligation to include a financial settlement called *ketubah*.<sup>5</sup> In other words, if you undo your hair in public, you have no claim on the 401K and you don't get any of the proceeds from the sale of the house!

One of the Rabbis wrote that it was "a religious duty to divorce" such a woman.<sup>6</sup>

She is also moved to pour out expensive ointment on His feet. Simon gave Him no oil, she would give Him of her own.

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 5:30.

<sup>5</sup> Bailey, p. 248.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

### **If He Were A Prophet...**

This scene is more than Simon can handle. He is utterly disgusted at even the thought of being touched by such a woman. Through his disgust we learn the real reason he invited Jesus to dinner. He wanted to see if He was really a prophet from God. Witnessing this horrendous scene gave him his answer.

### **Luke 7:39**

*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.”*

This dinner was about finding out who Jesus really was. It was not about enjoying Jesus’ company. Now Simon had his answer. Jesus was **NOT** a true prophet, because a true prophet would have enough spiritual discernment to know this woman was sinner and a prostitute and therefore, untouchable. Jesus was allowing her to touch Him so He could not possibly be a prophet.

### **Simon, I Have Something To Say To You**

There is much tension in the air at this moment. How long will this embarrassing scene go on? Jesus decides it is time to speak. He will no longer be quiet. Will he, as a good Pharisee would, rebuke this sinful woman? Will He say, “Lady, thank you for your show of affection, but you really cannot touch me as you are doing.” Or will Jesus accept this lady’s unusual demonstration of love?

Jesus **answers** Simon even though Simon never spoke a word out loud. What Simon had said he said to himself. Yet Jesus knows His thoughts – as a true prophet of God surely would.

### **Luke 7:40**

*And Jesus answering said to him, “**Simon, I have something to say to you.**”*

The tone carries a foreboding sentiment as if He were saying, “Simon, I am going to tell you something and you are not going to like it.” I heard this before when dad says, “Todd, I need to talk to you.”

Jesus then tells a very simple parable.

### **The Parable of the Two Debtors**

*7:41 **A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.***

*7:42 **When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?***

*7:43 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.*

A denarius equaled a day's wage for a laborer. So the first debtor owed just under two years worth of wages. If today your average annual income is \$50,000, then the debt would be close to \$100,000.

The second owed just under two months worth of wages. But they were both in the same boat – *neither of them could pay their debt.* Both were unable to produce the required payment. When you have nothing it doesn't matter whether you owe five dollars or five million dollars. If you can't pay, you can't pay.

Jesus told this parable to Simon. This story was for Simon. Jesus said, "*Simon, I have something to say to you.*" Simon needed to hear what Jesus had to say. This parable was for the one who thought he had no debt. Jesus wanted Simon to know that this Lady's many sins had been forgiven.

It's obvious to everyone who the two debtors are. The one who owed much was the sinful city woman. The one who owed little was Simon. Perhaps the reason Simon answered Jesus' question by saying, "The one, *I suppose*, for whom the larger debt was cancelled," was because he was reluctant to admit that he was a debtor.

The moneylender was Jesus and He forgave them both. He released them both from their obligation to repay the debt. Both the law-keeping Pharisee and the law-breaking woman from the city were in debt and completely unable to pay the debt. Both stood on the same bankrupt ground.

### **We Are All Debtors**

The first message of the parable is that all people are debtors. There is no one in the parable that is debt free. There are simply two types of debtors – the law-keepers and the law-breakers. There are those who are aware of their debt and those who are not. The woman was aware of her sins. Simon was not. The woman had many sins. Simon's sins were fewer in comparison. There is no one in the parable with out sin.

#### **1 Kings 8:46**

*There is no one who does not sin.*

#### **Eccl 7:20**

*Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.*

#### **Romans 3:23**

*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

There is no one who is without debt whether you call yourself a law-keeper or a law-breaker.

### **We Are All Unable To Pay Our Own Debt**

The second message of the parable is that they were both completely unable to pay for their debts.

**Psalms 49:7**

*Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life.*

The two debtors in the parable do not have what is needed to pay their debt. They both stand in desperate need of gracious forgiveness. In the parable, the only solution presented to solve the problem of the debt is forgiveness from the moneylender. There is no other solution except gracious forgiveness.

**We Are Indebted To God**

The third message of the parable is that the one to whom we are indebted is God. The debt in the parable represents sin. The reason sin is so sinful is because of the holiness of Him against whom we sin.

The seriousness of sin increases according to the dignity and worth of the one against whom we sin. If someone gets into a scuffle with a guy on the street, the crime is a misdemeanor. If the attack is against a police officer the crime is a felony. If someone goes after the President it is a federal crime.

Forgiveness is increasingly more difficult to obtain as the dignity and worth of the victim increases. God is of infinite dignity and infinite worth. Therefore any sin against Him is infinitely sinful and justly deserving of an infinite penalty. When we sin, we sin against an infinitely holy and perfect God.

James tells us,

**James 2:11**

*“Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. For He who said, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘Do not murder.’”*

All of the commandments were given by the one true God, so breaking even just one of His commands is an offense against Him personally. Breaking even just one of His holy commands places the lawbreaker outside of His perfect holiness. Sin is always first and foremost an affront against God Himself.

This is the message of David’s confession when he committed adultery with Bathsheba.

**Psalms 51:4**

*Against you and you alone have I sinned and what is evil in your sight.*

Joseph also acknowledged this when he was enticed by Potiphar’s wife.

**Genesis 39:9**

*How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God.*

Disobedience to God’s commands is equivalent to disdain for His person.

**Forgiveness Is Only Possible By Faith In Jesus**

The fourth message of the parable is that forgiveness of sins is only possible by faith in Jesus. Sins against an infinitely worthy God require an infinite payment. This is why we are absolutely unable to

pay for our sins against an infinitely holy God. *Finite creatures cannot pay an infinite price.* Only God can pay an infinite price. This is why God had to become flesh. This is why Jesus came – to forgive sinners of their infinite sins.

This is why this lady came **to Jesus** to offer her sacrifice of love instead of going to the temple. She knew that **only Jesus could forgive her of her many infinite sins.** And this is exactly what she found – forgiveness of sins, forgiveness of **many** sins. Forgiveness of many INFINITE sins against an infinitely holy God and Jesus forgave her.

Jesus said, “*Your sins are* (lit. “have been”) *forgiven.*” (7:48). And when Jesus said that everybody at the table came unglued saying, “Who is this who forgives sins? Jesus who do you think you are?”

### **Man, Your Sins Are Forgiven**

Two chapters back (5:21) when Jesus healed the paralytic He told him the same thing saying, “*Man, your sins are forgiven.*” And the Pharisees erupted, “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” And they were exactly right. Only God can forgive sins. Jesus could forgive sins because He was and is God!!!

### **Forgiven Much**

Jesus had forgiven her much. And because she was forgiven much, she could love much. She had been forgiven an infinite debt. Jesus had the right to forgive her debt because He incurred her debt. He absorbed the debt of her sins into His own soul. He had the authority to pay for her sins because He would pay for them with His own blood on the cross.

### **The True Christian Has Been Forgiven by God** (Is a Forgiven Sinner)

This is true of every true Christian. Every true Christian has had his or her sins forgiven on the cross. Every true Christian has been forgiven of an infinite debt paid for by the blood of Jesus. If you have put and are putting your faith in Jesus for the salvation of your soul, then you too have been forgiven much. Every true Christian is a forgiven sinner because in Jesus our obligation to pay for the sins of our soul is removed.

### **The True Christian Forgives Fellow Man** (Forgives Other Sinners)

True Christians have been forgiven and they also forgive others. Jesus expects His disciples to be like Him in this. He has freely and graciously forgiven us of our debts and we too are to freely and graciously forgive others who sin against us.

Jesus gave His disciples a model prayer (Matt 6:9-13) to guide them in their daily prayers. One of the lines in that prayer is,

#### **Matt 6:12**

*Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors.*

This means that forgiveness is to be a part of our daily lives. Forgiveness is to be included in our prayers every day, both for our own daily sins and for the daily sins of others against us. If we are asking for forgiveness for ourselves, then we must also be willing to grant it to others.



Jesus went on to be even more explicit.

#### **Matthew 6:14-15**

*14 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

Forgiving other people who sin against us is not optional. He not only expects us to be forgiving people, He requires it. In fact, our own personal experience of God's forgiveness of our sins hinges upon us doing the same for others. And if we fail to grant forgiveness, we cut ourselves off from experiencing the gracious forgiveness of God in our own lives.

#### **Mark 11:25**

*And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have **anything** against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.*

Our receiving forgiveness is dependant upon our forgiving others. When we are praying and God brings some issue to mind, something that someone has done to us, we are to forgive whatever it is that has been done against us. When we fail to forgive others, we hurt no one but ourselves.

#### **Luke 17:3-4**

*3 Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, 4 and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, I repent, you must forgive him.*

Forgiveness is not a one-time event. Forgiveness is a daily necessity. If someone sins against you, rebuke him. Don't keep it to yourself. Tell him. And if he says I'm sorry even seven times in one day **you must forgive him**. We cannot ignore this.

Forgiveness is health to your bones. It is freedom to your soul. Leave room for the wrath of God. Vengeance does not belong to you. It belongs to God alone. Sins are committed, yes. Yes, we hurt each other and every human soul will one day give an account before the judgment seat of Christ Jesus. God sees all sin. Nothing is hidden from His eyes.

Jesus knew that the sins of the woman were many! And yet He still forgave her. He forgave her of her infinite sins against His heavenly Father. Every sin is a sin against God and is infinitely sinful. God forgives infinite sins of all those who put their faith in Jesus.

When we commit sins against one another we do not commit infinite sins. Sins against one another are finite sins. If God can forgive infinite sins surely we can forgive the finite ones – even the ones that feel infinite.

#### **Jean-Paul Sampatu**

In Rwanda on April 16, 1994, the Hutus began killing the Tutsis. When the killing ended 100 days later nearly one million people had been murdered. Jean Paul Sampatu was out of the country at the time. When he returned he discovered that his father, mother, three brothers and one sister had been slaughtered. To increase the pain, he learned that they had been murdered by their neighbor, his childhood best friend. He lost his family and many friends.

He became enraged and made a list of the people he planned to kill. At the top of this list was Vincent, his former friend who had murdered his entire family. Hatred began to boil in his soul and soon to ease his pain he turned to drugs and alcohol.

Finally at the end of himself he sought out a witch doctor. He went to him, but he discovered that the witch doctor was actually a Baptist missionary. This man introduced Jean Paul to Jesus and led him on a two-year journey to forgiveness.

Eventually Jean-Paul did forgive Vincent. They were personally reunited and today they are friends again. Their children play together. Jean-Paul says, "Unless we learn to forgive, we have no hope."

Forgiveness is possible. Forgiveness is necessary. Forgiveness is freeing.

Unforgiveness is the garden in which hatred grows. And that kind of fruit has no place in the life of a true Christian. Love is the fruit of forgiveness. Jesus has forgiven us much and therefore, we too can forgive much.

**Leviticus 19:17**

*You shall not hate your brother in your heart... You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge... but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.*

Do not leave today with your sins unforgiven. Do not leave here today holding a grudge. If you need to forgive someone, do it today, in the name of Jesus and in the strength that only He can provide.

Remember the words of Jesus to this sinful city lady.

*"Your sins are forgiven. Your faith [in Me] has saved you. Go in peace!"*

By putting your faith in Jesus, all your sins are forgiven. Go in this peace.