

August 16, 2009 Temple Baptist Church, Jamestown, ND
TITLE: FORGIVENESS: NO STRINGS ATTACHED, Luke 7:36-50, *Apostles' Creed* #11

If you could ask for anything, what would it be and why? (Audience participation.) A couple weeks ago I was working on the message for today and discovered Troy Gunderson planned to use the same text.

Troy led us to think about our motivation, specifically, our motivation in gathering for worship. He shared about the different motivations of the Pharisee and the woman.

I will use the same text but with a different emphasis. Luke describes Jesus as unlike anyone the people have ever seen or heard. Responses vary, as Troy shared regarding the Pharisee and the woman. In fact one of the major themes of Luke is how people respond to Jesus. **The people whom we expect to respond to Jesus positively**, the “holy” people, **often do so with unbelief**. It is **those often overlooked**, friends of a paralytic, a widow, foreigners, children and a prostitute who **come to Jesus in faith**.

Jesus acknowledges this irony when commenting about John the Baptist in the preceding account. What was John’s mission? How did He proclaim it? What did John call the people to do? The Bible says that John preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Today I want to focus on that phrase, *the forgiveness of sins*. We were last in the series on the Apostles’ Creed in May and I had planned to complete the series with this message. But as I spent some time looking at what the Bible has to say about forgiveness, it seemed that we need to spend a little more time thinking about the phrase and our own lives in light of what the Bible says.

Please turn to #137 in the hymnal and join me in repeating the Apostles’ Creed. Now, let’s turn to the Luke 7 passage again and read vs. 36-50.

What comes to your mind when you hear the word *forgiveness*? Why is forgiveness important? Who needs forgiveness? Why? How do people try to acquire forgiveness?

The Luke 7 passage clearly illustrates what forgiveness is . . . and what it is not. We also learn that people have very different notions about who needs forgiveness and how to get it.

There are **two basic words** used in the NT when the topic of forgiveness is discussed. This text uses both. The first and most common word has as its root meaning **to let go or send away**. Jesus uses the word three times in verses 47

and 48. When Jesus pronounces the woman's sins forgiven, the people at the Pharisees house respond in astonishment (vs. 49).

The **other word**, used synonymously, but from a different root is found in Jesus' story about the moneylender who cancels (KJV- *forgave*) the large debts (vss. 42 & 43). The root meaning of this word is **to give a gift, to be gracious**.

Those two ideas, *to let go or send away* and *to give grace* are helpful to understand what forgiveness is and what it is not.

Forgiveness can be used as a financial term, as well as a moral term. In each case a debt is involved. If you owe me \$1 and I forgive your debt, who does that impact? Both of us. Who pays the debt? I do. **It's important to understand that forgiveness and being forgiven DOES NOT mean that the debt is ignored.** The debt is paid by another who is able and willing to pay it.

A dollar seems like such a small amount. Who doesn't have \$1? But debt is relative. A denarius is the one-day wage of a common laborer. One owes two months' wages, the other nearly 2 years' worth. Although Jesus doesn't indicate the relative wealth of the people in His illustration, the point is that **neither has the means to pay. Both need forgiveness. Both need grace.**

What is the woman's sin? Who has she wronged? (Audience.) What does the **Pharisee** owe? (Audience.) He owes basic hospitality, at least, to Jesus, the honored guest. What is the Pharisee's sin? (Audience.) Pride. Self-sufficiency. He can pay his debts . . . or so he thinks. He is **not even aware that he owes a debt that is unpayable.** To whom does the Pharisee owe?

The very nature of sin is that it is a **thought, word or deed** (done or omitted) **against God.** David acknowledges this in his well-known confession in Psalm 51. *Against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.* Psalm 51:4 It's not that David's sin of adultery and the subsequent cover up did not have consequences or harm others. **When we see sin as against others and not against God, we end up comparing ourselves and just treat the symptoms.**

Our problem is not unlike that of the Pharisee. We do not see ourselves as "sinners" and if we do acknowledge that we are, we say we've only sinned "a little". We think we can handle our debt. Back to a question I asked earlier. How do people deal with their sin? (Audience participation.) Who is the debt against? Remember, debt cannot be ignored. It must be paid.

I ask that you take two very simple, but powerful thoughts with you today.

- Come to Jesus and He will forgive.

The **Pharisee's pride not only prevents him from seeing his own need, it won't allow for the forgiveness of the woman either.** His understanding of forgiveness is **not God-directed**. He understands sin much the way we do. He chooses to ignore it, believe sin is not something he does, or he tries to do good things to compensate for any sin he may have committed. But sin, as Jesus says elsewhere, is really a matter of the heart.

Jesus asks a question in relation to the two men in His illustration, "Who will love him more?" Is Jesus saying that only those who sin a lot understand what forgiveness is? Paul asks a similar question when discussing the grace of God. *Shall we go on sinning that grace may increase? By no means!* Romans 6:1, 2

Who can forgive sins? In a previous passage in Luke 5 Jesus forgives the sins of the paralyzed man. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees comment that only God can forgive sins (5:21). Precisely. **Jesus is making a bold pronouncement of His identity.**

Back to Jesus' question about which man will love his forgiver more. He contrasts the response of the Pharisee with that of the woman. **Jesus links forgiveness . . . with love. That, I believe, is the key to understanding, receiving and giving forgiveness.** Paul refers to **Jesus** as the **One God loves**. *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.* Ephesians 1:7-8 Paul uses the word for letting go or sending away and then references it as the richness of God's grace.

To another group of believers Paul writes, *For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness (letting go/sending away) of sins.* Colossians 1:13-14

When you were dead in your sins . . . God made you alive with Christ. He forgave (gave grace) us all our sins. Colossians 2:13 **God forgave me by the cross.** He did not ignore the debt of my sin or pretend it does not exist. Jesus paid for my sin and your sin on the cross. That's how I can have forgiveness of sins (cf. Acts 5:31; 13:38; 26:18).

The Bible says, *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life."* John 3:16

Got any sins you need forgiven? We can all list the sins of others, but what about those of the person in the mirror? Do you need any sins sent away, let go? Do you need His grace? **What's standing in the way?**

Forgiveness is linked with repentance in the Bible: admitting our sin and turning to God . . . just like the woman, who demonstrates her repentance by her actions.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive (let go/send away) us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. 1 John 1:8-10 (cf. 2:12)

Come to Jesus and He will forgive. It's the same for all: children, adults, teens, those who have sinned "much" and those who have sinned "little."

- Forgive as God forgives you.

Although **Jesus** doesn't specifically say this to the Pharisee and his other guests, He **implies a next step. We cannot take them out of order.** The first is to come to Him to be forgiven. The next is to take the forgiveness we've received and give it to others.

When asked how to pray to God, Jesus includes these words, "*Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.*" Matthew 6:12 He includes this commentary. "*For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*" Matthew 6:14-15 Jesus is not talking about conditional forgiveness. Quite the opposite. **If we understand real forgiveness, we'll pass it on to others.** If we will not forgive, it begs the question if we have received it ourselves.

How often should we forgive? Any time and every time we are asked (cf. Matthew 18:21, 27, 32, 35; Luke 7:3-4). If the person is a brother or sister in the Lord, we are to point out any sin (rebuke), then forgive when asked. That's hard. Send it away; let it go. That's why we forgive as we've been forgiven.

Many of us have short memories when it comes to our own shortcomings, but long memories when it comes to the shortcomings of others. *Bear with each other and forgive (give grace) whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Colossians 3:13*

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving (giving grace) each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Ephesians 4:32

Who is God asking you to forgive (let go/send away that sin, give grace)?

Conclusion. *I believe . . . in the forgiveness of sins.* In the Apostles' Creed this phrase comes under the general section of the Holy Spirit. (*I believe in the Holy Spirit.*) It is the Holy Spirit Who brings conviction of our sin and our need of forgiveness. It is the Holy Spirit Who enables us to pass on the forgiveness to others that we have received in the finished work of Jesus Messiah on the cross.

Jesus links forgiveness with love, but it is not our love. God loves us and gave us Jesus, Who died paying the debt of my sin so I can be and live forgiven. It's that love, once received, that I share with others . . . no strings attached.

There is **something freeing about living in God's forgiveness**. *As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.* Psalm 103:12 There is **something freeing about extending God's forgiveness to others**. If you could ask for anything, what would it be?