

A meal with Jesus

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[0:00] So if you have your Bibles with you, just turn to Luke chapter 7 verses 36 to 50 with me. Luke 7 verse 36.

Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, 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 answered him, Simon, I have something to tell you. Tell me, teacher, he said. Two people 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 forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more? Simon replied, I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven. You have judged correctly, Jesus said.

Then he turned towards the woman and said to Simon, Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.

[1:37] You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, hasn't stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.

Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven, as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little, loves little. Then Jesus said to her, Your sins are forgiven.

The other guests began to say among themselves, Who is this who even forgives sins? Jesus said to the woman, Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.

This is the word of God. And what a story. Such an interesting story. We have a parable inside the story, the scene that is happening at this Pharisee's house.

Let me kind of take a moment with you and imagine what the place looks like. You see, in Jesus' time, a dinner party was a public event, right?

[2:39] It was also a private meal, but the guests, they didn't sit on a table like we did. They actually reclined on low couches, arranged around one central table.

So they are leaning on one elbow and eating with the other hand, and their feet are kind of stretched outward behind them. So the way it would work is the host would greet each guest with a kiss of welcome, water to wash their dusty feet, and then some oil for refreshment.

The meal itself, you have to imagine with me, we are in the Near East. It's flatbread, it's olives. We are talking figs, cheese, fish, perhaps some roasted lamb, wine mixed with water.

Conversations happened around the table. You would probably talk maybe about scripture, maybe about politics, the current events. And now the interesting thing is the doors were left open.

So uninvited people could actually stand there and listen to what was going on. Okay, we are imagining this room. Now, in this passage here today, we see a lot of different things happening.

[3:50] We see how Jesus once again surprises everyone by his actions. We see him deal with a Pharisee, with someone who is a hypocrite.

We see him deal with a woman who is sinful. And we see forgiveness taking place. And it all happens at a meal with Jesus. So today, I want to talk about having a meal with Jesus.

What does that mean? And then secondly, how a meal with Jesus exposes our hearts. And then finally, how it ends in forgiveness.

So the Pharisee Simon, he has invited Jesus for a meal. And to be honest, we don't really know why. One thing that's interesting is that just before this passage, we see that Jesus is talking about how John the Baptist, his cousin, he was always criticized for not eating and not drinking.

And all the people said, what a weirdo. But Jesus came eating and drinking. And people criticize him and say, he's a glutton and a drunk. And then right after he says that, we get this story about the Pharisee Simon inviting him over to his place.

[5:04] So he's invited by a Pharisee. Now Pharisees, we remember, they were the teachers of the scripture. They were really committed to following the laws.

They were making sure everyone else was following the laws as well. And this Pharisee was interested in Jesus. And we can understand why Jesus was controversial to some extent.

He healed people, performed miracles. And he also made some controversial statements sometimes. And you know what? Jesus went. He said, okay, I'll come.

I'll come for dinner. And I love that. Jesus, he actually spends time with all kinds of people, doesn't he? It doesn't matter to him which age or which stage in life. It didn't matter to him if they had money or not.

Status didn't matter. And we see this here in this chapter. Let's look a little bit at this in detail. What is happening? You see, the Bible could have said Jesus went to a Pharisee's house, had dinner, and left again.

[6:03] But actually Luke is diving into some detail here. Why? Because if you have a meal with Jesus, you have a meal with the living God.

And of course, the story takes a bit of a turn. It doesn't just stay at a dinner party between Jesus and the Pharisee. Someone else comes in.

A woman. A woman. A woman with a sinful past, we are being told. And the commentators would say it was probably a prostitute. And it must have been a bizarre scene.

Can you imagine Jesus sitting there or lying there? The Pharisees. And then the other guests around the table. And in comes this woman. And I think there is an application in there already.

Let's press pause on there already. Because eating and spending time is usually something we only do with people we like and appreciate.

[7:01] But Jesus, he's not like that. He's like a magnet for people, isn't he? They are fascinated with him. The wealthy, the educated, as well as the poor and the marginalized. He is such an interesting figure that not only the Pharisee invites him, but also the prostitute comes in and wants to see him.

And I do believe that sometimes we struggle with that. We struggle to get out of our comfort zone and approach people that we usually wouldn't be as comfortable with as with our dearest friends.

But I also believe that if we do spend time with people from different places, different backgrounds, that God blesses that. And that we might be surprised to see what happens when we exit our comfort zone and throw ourselves into these kind of situations.

So, before we dive further into the story, I'd just like to think with you a little bit just about that. What does it mean to actually start a ministry that involves relationships with people that maybe you would never have a relationship with?

Thomas Chalmers. Who knows who Thomas Chalmers is? He was one of the founding fathers of the Free Church of Scotland, of which we are a part of.

[8 : 23] That's a cool background tune for the sermon. Not what I imagined. Well, that's good. Now, Thomas Chalmers, he was a really smart guy. He was actually a professor for moral philosophy in St. Andrews.

And he was known for visiting every single home in his parish. So, in 1819, he became the minister of St. John's Parish in Glasgow.

And it was one of the city's poorest districts. It was overcrowded, industrial, it was full of hardship, all sorts of things taking place. And instead of relying on some charity organizations, he actually divided this parish in smaller districts.

And he assigned one elder and a deacon each. And he told them to visit every family, the rich and the poor, offering spiritual care and practical help.

Now, Chalmers himself visited every single home. The poor, the needy, the rich, the educated.

[9 : 26] And he learned all their names. He learned about family situation. He encouraged them. He encouraged self-reliance. He tried to help them through whatever means they had and gave them dignity.

Talked to them. And extended compassion to them. And within a few years, what happened? The parish saw a dramatic improvement morally as well as socially.

Reduced poverty, revived church attendance, all through personal relational ministry. We see that in the history of the church over and over again.

And we see that here in this passage. Jesus goes to the Pharisee's house. But he also ate with tax collectors, with people who were not part of the popular people.

And so, in this meal, in this dinner, something's happening. Because if Jesus comes to your house, you can be sure he will look at you. He will talk to you. He will ask hard questions.

[10 : 25] He will expose our hearts. So, this woman comes in. And around her neck, probably, she has this jar made of alabaster with really expensive perfume in it.

And before anyone really knows what's happening, this woman starts weeping and her tears drop down onto Jesus' feet. And she dries it with her hair.

And she pours her perfume on his feet. Now, that does sound strange to our modern ears. And to be honest, not only to our modern ears, but back in Jesus' day, it was also controversial, to say the slightest.

It was scandalous, actually. Why? Well, it's already strange that a woman like her goes to the house of a Pharisee. But it's even more controversial that she unties her hair.

You don't do that in that time. That she interacts with a man as a woman. You don't do that in that time. That she touches Jesus' feet, who was regarded as a rabbi.

[11 : 27] And who was therefore made impure by her actions. Scandalous. You can see the shock in the faces of the Pharisees. You can hear the gasp, almost.

So, a woman like her, she was known to be particularly defiling. It's terrible, but it's true. So, unsurprisingly, the Pharisees, they were shocked that this woman broke almost every rule, every social and religious rule that they had for that situation.

And so, from the outside, from the perspective of the Pharisee, from the perspective of the law, she was a sinner. Nobody to be seen. Nobody to be given any attention.

Only if it was about, you know, judging her. Just a strange woman who is pouring out extremely valuable oil over Jesus' feet and whose behavior is completely inappropriate.

And here's the good news. Jesus doesn't look on the outside. He sees the outside, of course. But Jesus looks at the heart. And Jesus not only looks at the heart, but he exposes the heart, doesn't he?

[12:35] He does that here. After Simon sees what is happening, Simon the Pharisee kind of says to himself, mumbles into his beard, that a real prophet would not tolerate that kind of behavior.

Jesus, he knows, maybe, I'm not sure if Jesus actually heard what Simon was saying there, but he definitely knows what Simon is thinking. And so, he says to Simon, I have something to tell you.

And we have to give credit to Simon the Pharisee, because he responds with a posture of respect, doesn't he? He actually says, okay, yes, teacher, I'm listening. So, Jesus, so often, gives him a story.

Jesus loves stories. So, he's telling a story. So, he says, two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him 500 denarii and the other 50. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both.

Now, which of them will love him more? And, of course, the story is very obvious. The point is very obvious. So, even Simon the Pharisee can't say, I don't know.

[13:38] So, he says, well, I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven. And Jesus says, yeah, that's correct. You have judged correctly. Now, let me point out a few things that I think Jesus is trying to say by telling this story.

The first thing is obvious. Both of them have debt. Both of the people he mentions have debt. The one who owes much and the one who owes little.

And here's the most important thing about the parable. Neither can pay it back. They are in the same boat. It doesn't matter if you have a lot of debt or little debt if you can't pay it back.

Legally, what would happen? He would go to prison. He would lose everything. Now, if we think about ourselves, and we try to put ourselves in Simon's shoes, maybe, then we have to think, yeah, we all have debt.

And there is not a single person in this room who doesn't have debt with God. That's the point Jesus is making here. Neither you, Simon, nor you, woman. You are both.

[14:43] You owe God, right? So, the problem is not how much debt you have. Your problem is that you have a debt that you can't get rid of yourself. So, the consequences will be the same.

It doesn't matter if you're a Pharisee or if you're the woman in that situation. The third thing is your works, right? Your efforts, they don't really make a difference.

You see, Simon is standing there, or sitting there, lying there, I guess. And he's thinking, I'm alright. I'm doing okay. I'm trying, you know. I know the law. I go to the synagogue.

I wash myself. I do the sacrifices. I pray. I'm okay. I'm really, really, really trying hard. And so, he's trying to work off his debt by himself.

And he doesn't understand that he actually can't pay it back. And that's a bit like having a bucket with muddy water, and you try to make clean water. And you just add some clean water every now and then. But, of course, the water stays muddy, doesn't it?

[15:44] The mud, the dirt, doesn't just go away. You need a new bucket with new water. So, Jesus compares Simon to the one in the story who owes 50 denarii, a month's wage, roughly speaking.

You know, he's a Pharisee trying to follow the law, Ten Commandments, and comes to the conclusion that he is alright, you know. At least I'm trying. Nobody's perfect, right? But, he invited Jesus.

Think about that. Simon invited Jesus, thinking that Jesus would love to go to his house. Because he's especially good.

He doesn't invite Jesus because he loves Jesus. That's the difference between him and the woman. See, the difference between the Pharisee and the woman is not that one is morally upright and the other one is immoral.

The difference is not that one is interested in Jesus and the other one isn't. They're both interested in Jesus. The point is this. One of them loves Jesus.

[16:56] The other one doesn't. One actually approaches Jesus wholeheartedly with her whole being, as a complete being, with emotions, with everything she has.

Simon the Pharisee, he treats Jesus like he would treat any other guest. Let's think about that. Do we treat Jesus as we would treat any other guest?

We may be interested in him intellectually. We find him fascinating. But do we actually come to Jesus and we put him in control and we humble ourselves before him?

Because that's what the woman does. The good news in this passage is that even if you've done a lot of bad things, Jesus is not sending you away because you aren't good enough.

Because nobody is good enough, right? The only way to become a Christian is by saying that you're not good enough. I'm good enough because I'm not good enough. Right? That's the claim of Christianity.

[18:02] If you think you're too far gone, then look at this woman. Because she knows how sinful she was. That's the point. She knows how sinful she was. She knows that she is indebted to God.

That's the fundamental difference here. Simon doesn't know that he's sinful. The woman does. And the second thing is that she was sorry. That she was utterly sorry.

Imagine the social barriers she had to go through in order to get herself to go to the Pharisee's house because she heard that Jesus was going to be there.

And she just had to be there, right? She just had to find this man because inside of her there was this emptiness from a life that wasn't fulfilling her. And she wasn't a poor woman.

No, she had that alabaster jar with probably nard oil in there. And scholars say it was probably about a year's wage worth. That's expensive.

[19:04] I think if we translate it to UK terms, average income a year is about 40k. I think that's just, that's what this little alabaster jar was worth.

But she realized that it was worth nothing if she hadn't got a reason to get out of the bed in the morning. It was worth nothing, she thought, if I haven't got a relationship with the living God.

The perfume was worth nothing if I have to just use it, if I have to use it on myself. It's all vanity. But if Jesus claims to be who he is, that we believe that he was who he claimed to be.

If he actually is the true son of God, then maybe, maybe he can forgive me. Maybe he could give me a life that is fulfilling. So she's coming in there with hope.

She's coming in there with faith. And you see what's happening there. The woman doesn't care about how much it would cost her. Take this oil. I don't care.

[20:09] I don't need it. Take my tears. She's humbling herself before Jesus. And she's giving him her most costly possession, her everything. She's treating him like royalty.

And Jesus, he doesn't say, go away. You have no business being here with me. Doesn't, Jesus doesn't do that. No, Jesus looks at her lovingly with pure eyes.

Can you imagine what that woman felt in that moment? Maybe it was one of the first few times in her life that the man had looked at her without judgment or without lust in his eyes.

And he tells her, your sins are forgiven. The woman understands that God's grace is costly. And she symbolizes that by saying, I give you what is dearest to me.

Take it. Now the truth is that many of us are walking around with an alabaster jar and expensive oil around her necks. And we just have different names for it.

[21:16] Money, sex, power. Reputation. What people think about us. The way we portray ourselves to the world on social media. Our careers.

And so many of us are unwilling to give it up to Jesus. So many of us are clinging to our jaws, wanting to be independent. This woman here is our example.

She is our role model. So the question is, what is our hard posture? Do we invite Jesus for dinner, hang out with him, give ourselves a pat on the shoulder, treat him like any other guest, and then get on with our lives?

Do we treat Jesus like Simon treated Jesus? Just another intellectual interesting person, another task, another little adventure to keep me stimulated?

Or do we commit to him like this woman here committed to him? Do we come to him in complete dependence, as complete beings, giving him our emotions, giving him our sins, giving him our everything?

[22:21] Are we vulnerable, and are we throwing ourselves at Jesus' feet, treating him the way he deserves to be treated, and put him in control over our lives? Do we center our lives around Jesus alone, not our reputation, not whatever is in that alabaster jar you're carrying around with you?

Now, one thing Simon doesn't grasp is that he is actually not doing real hospitality. He doesn't wash Jesus' feet.

He doesn't put oil on his head. He doesn't actually give him the treatment that he deserved. He is not as vulnerable as he needs to be.

He is treating Jesus like he would treat any other guest. I've said it a couple times already. The woman commits to him. As I said, the difference is not that one is interested in Jesus and the other isn't.

It's not that they are unwilling to listen to him. The difference is not that one is moral and the other immoral. The difference between them is that one person repents and accepts Jesus' forgiveness, while the other one keeps Jesus at arm's length.

[23:38] I'm willing to maybe engage with him on an intellectual level. I'm willing to acknowledge that Christians follow Jesus' teaching, and it's a good way of living life.

But I'm actually not letting him in to my heart. I'm not actually giving him the corners that he really needs to access. The woman sees that she owes, Simon doesn't.

Do you know that you owe God? Do you know that you are in debt? As I said, what are the legal consequences for both of them? They're in the same boat, whether they owe much or whether they owe just a little.

Well, if they can't pay it back, and Jesus is making the point that they can't, they will lose everything, and they will end up in prison. Think about it like this, just to use, it's a bit of a blunt illustration, but I couldn't think of anything better.

It doesn't matter, you know, let's say you go to Glasgow late at night, someone pulls a knife, stabs you, you're dead. It doesn't matter if you die that way, or if someone takes a machine gun and shoots you a lot.

[24:48] If you know what I mean, if you're dead, you're dead. If you're in prison, you're in prison. If you owe, you owe. And what wonderful good news Jesus is giving them. Forgiveness is available.

For both of them, did you see that? A little detail in the parable. Both of them can have the forgiveness. Jesus is not asking who will be forgiven. He's asking who will love the moneylender more.

Now, the woman we know receives forgiveness. Jesus is pronouncing forgiveness upon her by faith. He tells her that her faith has saved her. We don't actually know whether Simon repented.

We don't actually know whether Simon received forgiveness. It's not mentioned. Maybe. We don't know. But the offer is there. Jesus makes it clear that the moneylender, that's God, that's Jesus himself.

He says, I'm the moneylender. I'm ready to forgive you if you are willing to give me your everything. If you are willing to give me your life. Now, we are thinking about hospitality.

[25:53] And I'll close with this. I just want to practically think through what this could mean for us hosting people, visiting people, spending time with people as a church.

And I'll use the three headings that I've had in this sermon, although I'm not sure I really mentioned them. But the first heading was a meal with Jesus. If we show hospitality to people, let's do it in a way where they can meet Jesus.

If not through words. If the conversation doesn't allow it. Then through our actions. The way we treat them. The way we host. The way we care. If we give them our attention.

If they can actually tell. You can tell. You've always been to different dinner parties. To people where you couldn't wait until you could go back home and watch your Netflix show.

And the dinner parties where you actually didn't want to leave because it was so much fun. Now, food helps tremendously, of course. Meals, we see here, kind of break down social barriers.

[26:57] They actually make people seen and appreciated. It doesn't have to be a meal. I don't want to put more stress on you if you feel so stretched already. It's always in proportion to the money, the time and the resources that you have.

If you can't cook like myself. I can give you tips of how you can invite yourself to other people's places. But it's about seeking to spend time with people. Invite them for a cup of coffee.

Or a cup of tea. That's the baseline, I think. We are not looking for a massive change from today to tomorrow. If you've never invited someone, I don't expect you to invite someone for a full Sunday rose tomorrow.

That's not what we're looking for. We're looking for little changes that make a big difference. 1% changes every day. The next thing is that, as we said, the involved people...

Sorry, I can't read my own notes. As we said, it involves loving people. It involves loving people. Even people that are difficult to love sometimes.

[28:01] And you can all think... You can all just think of that one person, probably, that you are hesitant to invite over to your place. That you maybe struggle with.

Who makes you slightly uncomfortable. Now, work towards that goal. To actually spend time with people that you wouldn't actually spend time with. Not because you have to.

But because you want to. Because you know Jesus would want to spend time with them. Step out of your comfort zone. 1% every day makes a difference. Excuse me.

Now, the second header was that a meal with Jesus exposes hearts, right? When you are having people over to your place, let's say. Or you are meeting people for food.

You have conversations, right? The idea of having a meal is that it slows things down. Your conversations. Do they always stay at a superficial level?

[28:57] Is it always just external stuff? Do you only talk about sports, politics, the weather? Or does it actually move to internal matters as well?

And perhaps even eternal. That's a good way of thinking about it. External moving to internal moving to eternal. Do we talk about what we believe, what we feel, what we experience in our lives with the people we spend time with?

Are you able to take off your alabaster jar that you are carrying around with you?

Showing to people that whatever they think you center your life around is perhaps wrong. But you center your life around Jesus alone.

That he is the one most important thing in your life. And that they can have that too. That it's worth more than anything else you possess.

[29:59] That it doesn't matter what else you have. If you have Jesus. Does the way you care for people mirror a Christ-likeness? Or are you doing it for your own reputation?

To make yourself feel good about yourself. Are you having people over and everything has to be perfect? Or are you willing to just invite them in your house and the kids have put stuff everywhere and it's all a bit messy.

And you just don't care because you're happy to see them and happy to have them over. Thirdly. Let's close with this. It's a meal that ends in forgiveness. Do we approach hospitality task-oriented?

It's just another thing to take off the calendar. Or is it a relational matter? Do we actually slow down? Do we actually...

Are we in the present... How do you say it? We're in the presence with other people. We are looking at them. We are listening to them. We care for them.

[31:03] Hospitality means welcoming, creating space, paying attention, providing. It's a communal thing. We're in this together. That sort of idea.

Even if we do it in the church with other Christians. Company. The word company comes from a Latin word and it means together bread.

We're sharing bread together. Right? That's what real fellowship, that's what real company looks like. Let's learn from this woman here. The act of the woman, whatever she's doing here, is not seen as scandalous in Jesus' eyes, but as deeply meaningful.

Right? She's hosting Jesus in a way that Simon the Pharisee didn't host Jesus. She is doing what Simon was supposed to do. She's welcoming Jesus.

She's honoring him. She's acknowledging him. She's acknowledging her own need. She's acknowledging that she needs forgiveness. Tim Callis, he wrote a book on hospitality.

[32 : 08] He says, meals slow things down. Some of us don't like that. We like to get things done, but meals force us to be people oriented instead of task oriented. Invite the people that you love.

Invite your friends. Invite Jesus and invite those that you want to get to know. Invite those that you maybe even have a problem with. You might not know where it ends up, right?

We see this meal ends in tears. In forgiveness. It ends with a person giving her life to Jesus. So let's always make sure, whatever way you host people or visit people, if it's just a cup of tea or if it's a full on dinner, that Jesus is there.

That he is our example. That he is our Lord. That he is the money lender who is willing to forgive people's sin. Because he went to the cross.

And he absorbed the debt. He paid for it all through his death. Let's approach him in praise. Let's invite him to our dinners.

[33 : 22] Let us pray. Father, we give thanks for this passage. We give thanks for the story of Simon and that woman. And we are amazed by how Jesus loves everyone.

We are amazed by how he knows exactly what to say and when to say. And that he appreciates real faith, genuine repentance, and surrendering our alabaster jars.

So help us, Father, as we walk through this life. That we are reminded that we should always center our lives around Jesus. That we should help others to do the same.

And we ask that you would go with us in this next week. That you would give us opportunities to do exactly that. And to reflect Jesus' character to others.

In our neighborhoods, in our families, in our workplaces. We need you, Lord. So we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.