

Tears, Kisses and Perfume

Three things that Jesus is still looking for today

Reading: Luke 7, 36-50

From the title you might think this a story from a romantic novel, and in a way, yes it is. In this drama that is to be acted out before us there are three main characters and a supporting cast of onlookers on the stage of life.

First of all we meet Simon the Pharisee, one of the religious leaders of the day whose dress and mannerisms would reflect exactly that vocation.

Then we meet Jesus, the son of God, in fact God the Son in human form visiting the peoples of Earth and bringing with him uncompromising truth, compassion and love from His Father in heaven.

Finally we meet an unnamed lady known only as a 'sinner,' the precise nature of her sin and occupation being left to our imaginations, and of course your first guess will be the right one, as you will see shortly.

A Pharisee, the Son of God and a sinful woman, so begins an unlikely story with all the hallmarks of scandal, but who will be the cause and what will be scandalous? The episode opens with Simon the Pharisee inviting Jesus to his home for a meal one evening. That Jesus would even accept the offer is surprising in itself as his most outspoken and threatening opposition came from this very group of people. Jesus however was not daunted, and as always took advantage of every opening to present his message. An opportunity to speak with a custodian of the temple and a guardian of the truths of Moses was not one to be missed, and so he went.

Now homes in that warm, sultry climate were not particularly private and are largely unchanged today. Meals were often taken in the courtyard or open patio area within the four walls of the building, which could be entered from the street typically through an archway. Unlike today when we eat seated at a high table usually in a kitchen or dining room, the people on that evening would have been reclining on pillows or cushions around a low table, helping themselves from the bowls of food placed upon it. And so the evening began.

As the meal followed its course suddenly a woman came in from the street carrying a small jar of almost priceless perfume. It was immediately obvious both who she was and what was her particular way of making a living. People glanced up as she approached Jesus and stood behind him at his feet weeping a flood of tears that fell almost like a waterfall to the ground. By now every eye would be upon the uninvited visitor wondering what was going to happen.

Luke records that, "she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped *them* with the hair of her head; and then she kissed His feet and anointed *them* with the fragrant oil." Remarkably, and we can only surmise the reason, Simon knew exactly who this woman was and feeling embarrassed he began to mutter to himself under his breath, saying, "This man, if He were a prophet or man of God, would know who and what manner of woman *this is* who is touching Him, for she is a sinner."

Jesus, who knows all things, especially the heart of man, did not need to hear Simon's critical words with his ear, he just knew the train of thought that was flickering behind Simon's eyes. He said, "Simon, I have something to say to you." Simon replied, "Teacher, say it." And so Jesus told a story of two men who had run up big debts, a story that would not be out of place today.

"There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. "And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both."

Now five hundred denarii was a great deal of money, maybe over a year's wages in modern currency, whilst fifty denarii was not so much, but still a large amount of maybe \$4,000. Both men had lost control of their spending and naturally speaking were about to feel the full force of the law which in those days could be very severe. The banker might even sell them into life-long slavery, so to have their debt cancelled and to be forgiven was a undeserved, unexpected and most astonishing blessing.

Jesus asked, "Simon, tell me therefore, which of them will love the banker more?" Simon answered and said, "I suppose the *one* whom he forgave more, the one who owed maybe \$40,000." And Jesus said to him, "Yes, that is right, you have rightly judged."

Then Jesus began to make his point. He turned to look at the woman but addressed his words to Simon in the hearing of all of course.

"Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped *them* with the hair of her head. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil.

Therefore I say to you, her sins, *which are* many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to he whom little is forgiven, *the same* loves little."

Now just changing the subject and taking a short interval from the real-life drama that is unfolding before us, it is worth spending a moment to discover a treasure chest of truth in those last words of Jesus. We have some friends in Spain, all of whom were formerly street people, that is to say drug addicts and traffickers, prostitutes and perverts of all kinds until they heard the gospel and knelt before Jesus, who forgave them and gave them the power to leave their

lives of crime and depravation and to begin all over again. Nowadays they serve as missionaries in some of the darkest, most violent and needy parts of the world, loving and caring for some of the most unlovable and unapproachable people you will ever find.

I have always wondered how they do this so willingly when it is the hardest job in the world to persuade some of the believers in our smart Western churches to help anyone who is lost and looks it, or is unsociably hungry, ragged, naked, in prison or sick. The fact of the matter is that these street people have chosen to love Jesus 'a lot' and they have turned from their vices. They have been forgiven much and know it to be so. Therefore in the words of Jesus, being forgiven much they love much, and that abundance of love overflows into a world of pain, injustice and suffering.

Can it be that there was much to be forgiven in their past? Must we have a twisted, cruel past in order to qualify for an abundance of love towards God and men and women?

Indeed there was much to forgive, but equally there are no limits to the depths of forgiveness that can be found in God's love as men and women turn towards Him, through Jesus. However that forgiveness only comes with repentance. The greater the depth of repentance that we offer to Jesus, that is confessing and turning from our inward or external sins whatever they are, the more unlimited forgiveness we find.

If we repent but little and just add God to our Sunday agenda, then we are forgiven little and naturally enough in consequence, we love little. If on the other hand we receive infinite depths of God's mercy upon us, we also receive new depths of love for our fellow man in his spiritual distress.

Our unnamed lady loved much, and much to the consternation of the onlookers who knew that God alone could forgive sins, Jesus said to her , "Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

We will come back to this beautiful conclusion in a short while but in the excitement of this captivating story we have run past an important truth that is essential for the guidance of every believer today. In the short discourse that Jesus gave he pointed out three things that are important to Him, that He looks for as He is invited into the company of men and women. As Jesus is God, and as God never changes although this world certainly does, we can safely say that He is still looking for these three things when we whisper in prayer, "Come, Lord Jesus."

But will he find them? In Simon's house he was disappointed,

"Simon, **you gave me no water for my feet**, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped *them* with the hair of her head."

"Simon, **you gave me no kiss**, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in."

"Simon, **you did not anoint my head with oil**, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil."

Tears, kisses and perfume, or water for the feet of Jesus, a kiss for Jesus and refreshing oil for Jesus. Why are these three things so important? Why was Jesus looking for them? Why is he still looking for them?

Water for the feet speaks to us very powerfully, and you will see why in a moment, about the Life of the Christian. In John 13 there is an astounding record of what happened one evening just before the Cross, and as you read it in a moment always remember who Jesus is. He is the eternal, the person of God, wholly divine, the creator, the giver of life, the giver of light and our Saviour, the coming King.

"Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.

And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's *son*, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself.

After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe *them* with the towel with which He was girded. Then He came to Simon Peter. And *Peter* said to Him, "Lord, are You washing my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this." Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also *my* hands and *my* head!"

So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am.

If I then, *your* Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."

Washing feet stands for humble, sacrificial service which is the Life of the Christian. It is what believers do when we become followers of Jesus, it is not an option or a job for a special few. Do we therefore take a bowl and a towel with us to church? Actually that would be quite easy, only our pride might suffer a little. It would not be unpleasant to do, unlike the humble act of the Saviour who washed the feet of men who had walked in open sandals all day on streets which were dusty and littered with every kind of human and animal waste.

No, the reality is that we are to wash the feet of Jesus as a lifestyle seven days and nights a week wherever the opportunity presents itself, not as a special Sunday act of humility. How can we do that? The answer is simple, in the words of Jesus from Matthew 25, 35 onwards,

"I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me."

Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, "Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed *You*, or thirsty and give *You* drink? When did we see You a stranger and take *You* in, or naked and clothe *You*? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?"

And the King will answer and say to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me."

I am sure no further explanation is needed!

Secondly kisses speak to us about worship, for the very word worship comes from an original Greek word which means to bow forward and kiss. The woman kissed Jesus without ceasing, intensively and with fervour, giving us a beautiful picture of how our worship should be as we come into the presence of the risen, living Lord Jesus Christ.

Just as humble, sacrificial service is the lifestyle of the Christian, so worship is the Purpose of the Christian, before anything else. In fact worship is the final goal of the Great Commission that Christ gave us in Matthew 28.19,

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age."

Yes, it is important to preach the gospel to the lost. Yes, it is essential to plant new churches. Yes, it is binding upon us to help the poor. Yes, we must raise men, money and materials for mission and all of these fundamental tasks will only cease on the day when a multitude from every nation, tribe, people and language stands in front of Jesus and worships, bowing forward and kissing Him with many kisses of love and gratitude, and yes, on this earth before they ever get to heaven. As John Piper rightly says, "Mission exists because worship does not." "The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea," (Habbakuk 2.14) and that will be the end of Great Commission activities. We have a way to go yet!

Lastly, oil speaks to us as oft-used Bible language for the Holy Spirit who is the Power of the Christian. It is the Holy Spirit who empowers the Life of the Christian and the Purpose of the Christian, for we must worship in Spirit and in truth. When Jesus comes He expects the oil to flow releasing fragrance and refreshing to the weary travellers on the road of life.

In many ways the twentieth century could be called the century of the Holy Spirit because of the way God restored His Spirit to the Church beginning in the Pentecostal revivals of the 1900's. In the 1950's the blessing spread far and wide and in recent years new waves of the presence of the Holy Spirit have swept over the Church worldwide.

We who have been revived time and again in His love and newness have a thousand, thousand reasons to rejoice and be thrilled with God, but let us heed the words of Jesus and take this observation recorded in Luke 12.48 to heart,

"For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to him to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more."

Dr. David Shibley comments with profound wisdom that in view of these words of Jesus, God will require much of the churches of believers in the West because of their immense heritage in the truth, and because of their abundance of manpower, leaders, buildings and incalculable wealth.

He goes on further to rightly point out that God will require even more from the modern Pentecostal and Charismatic churches of all kinds, because of the simple fact that they have received so much more of the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit, whose work they correctly celebrate every week.

Jesus looks for three things every time He comes to visit.

1. Your lifestyle as a believer, in humble, sacrificial service.
2. Your purpose as a believer, expressed in passionate worship.
3. Your power as a believer, released as you allow the oil of the Holy Spirit to flow in private and in public meetings.

But what about the scene we left behind a few minutes ago? We must return and see what happens in the end. What about the woman? We are left with eight words to consider, but within them lies a whole world of truth, beauty, hope and understanding of the loving heart of God, and a glimpse of her future. Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you."

What faith is that? Had we noticed in her the expressions of faith that we expect of each other in church? Hardly! But observe -

1. She had faith to come to Jesus at whatever personal cost that might have meant, breaking every cultural rule in the society of her day and overcoming every fear within.
2. She had faith to stand at his feet weeping genuine tears of sorrow for her sin.
3. She had faith to serve Jesus upon her knees, washing and drying His feet.
4. She had faith to offer Jesus her very best, even though the perfumed oil was the result of a life of sin.

Jesus said to her, "Go in peace." That is to say go in '*eirene*' or '*shalom*' in the original language, which means, "go into peace, good health, favour, prosperity, rest, knowing that all is well, safety and oneness with God, man and with yourself," for that is the meaning of the blessing that Jews greet each other with.

The prostitute left the Pharisee's home as a princess for such is the depth of love and blessing that is found in Jesus, then and today.

In conclusion, can I ask you if you have never found and loved Jesus that you reach out to Him, as your God, your Lord and your Saviour, in prayer today and you will discover Him to be just as gracious, kind and loving as did the woman who lived so long ago.

Can I invite those who believe already to offer Jesus their lives in humble, sacrificial service beyond any level they have ever contemplated before, and to give themselves to worship Him from this day onwards with a passion that can only be received by allowing the Holy Spirit to have a new freedom in their lives to empower them. For Jesus, that He may come and be satisfied with our tears, kisses and perfumed oil.

God bless you.

Les Norman

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