

A Worshipped Saviour Luke 7:44-50

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
The New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Introduction

Today we conclude our series entitled The Gospel of Christ Jesus with a talk based on Luke 7:4 to 50 and called A Worshipped Saviour. All Bible quotations are from the New King James Version unless otherwise stated.

Our series of talks have taken us into Luke 5 to consider the purpose of the Saviour, Luke 7 to look at an accessible Saviour and Luke 15 to see a seeking Saviour. Today we are returning to Luke 7, and to the same account of Jesus meeting with a woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee that we considered previously under the title, an accessible Saviour.

In today's talk we will be focussing on the worship of the Saviour. Worship is the proper end-product of salvation, which is why this is a suitable climax to this series. To be saved is to be reconnected with the God who created us; and created us to know, enjoy and worship Him. It really isn't possible to truly know God and **not** be drawn to worship Him. Most organisations today like to have a 'core purpose.' The health service organisation that I work for states that it exists to, "Save and improve patient's lives." That's not a bad reason to go to work. We might say that the core purpose of our Saviour is to save sinners and make them part of the worshipping family of God, and that the core purpose of a Christian is to love and worship God and enjoy His company forever. That's even better than what I do for a 'day job!' So, let's see how and why the Saviour is worshipped.

Today's passage is fairly brief, so I will read through it all in one go. But first, a quick summary of what has happened so far. Jesus has been invited to the house of a Pharisee, called Simon, for a meal. After He has sat down, a sinful woman from the city, hears that Jesus is there and enters the house, carrying a flask of fragrant oil, with which she proceeds to anoint Jesus. The Pharisee thinks to himself that if Jesus really was a prophet, He should have known what kind of woman He was allowing to touch Him. At this point, Jesus tells Simon a simple story about a creditor who forgives the debts of two men: one who owed a significant debt and one who owed a huge debt, ten times the size of the first. Jesus asks Simon which of the two debtors would love the creditor more. Simon answers, possibly reluctantly, that the one who has been forgiven most will love most. Jesus tells Simon that he has answered correctly. Then come today's verses.

"Then [Jesus] turned to the woman and said to Simon, '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 whom little is forgiven, the

same loves little.' Then He said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.' And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?' Then He said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you. Go in peace'" (Luke 7:44-50).

It's interesting how the focus of this account shifts from Simon to the woman as it progresses. In Simon's mind, he was the central character. After all, it was **his** house, **his** meal, and **his** invitation, and he was the one sitting in judgement on this woman, whom he regarded as an unsavoury, unwelcome intruder. But Jesus is determined to shift the focus towards the woman. His remark, "Do you see this woman?" certainly does that. It might also imply that Simon had been studiously avoiding looking at her! The social rules of the day might have meant that she was at liberty to join herself to the company uninvited, but that did not make her welcome to the fastidious Pharisee! Jesus proceeds to contrast the actions of Simon and the woman he so despises. This underlines the message of the two debtors illustration that Jesus has just given Simon. It also highlights the fact that Simon had been rather a neglectful, not to say rude, host! The provision of water to wash the guests' feet was a basic civility in a hot, dusty country where people wore sandals. Simon would not have been expected to do the washing himself since this was the job of a slave, although, of course, Jesus washed His disciples' feet in an important lesson to them, but he would have been expected to provide, as a minimum, a bowl of water. A towel and a servant, or slave, to use it would have been more appropriate.

There seems to me to be something of a hierarchy in the three actions Jesus mentions. Washing feet is something you would do as a common courtesy for any visitor. A kiss is what you would reserve for a guest or friend. Anointing is a special distinction for a person who is to be honoured. For each of the three actions, Jesus contrasts the behaviour of Simon with that of the woman he is looking down on.

Simon had failed to provide even a bowl of water out of courtesy. The woman uses her tears to wash Jesus' feet. Not only that, in the absence of any towel, she uses her hair to wipe them dry again. We read in 1 Corinthians chapter 11 that a woman's hair is her glory. This lady subordinates her glory in order to honour the Lord Jesus. We might say that she places her own glory at Jesus feet and even uses the tears shed over her own sinfulness to serve Him.

Simon had not placed a single kiss on the head or face of Jesus, thus indicating that he did not regard him as a friend or an honoured guest. The lady Simon disregards has showered multiple kisses on the Lord's feet. The words used are that she "has not ceased... since the time I came in." She clearly pours honour on Jesus. She doesn't place herself in any kind of equality with the Lord or act as if she had the rights and privileges of a friend, by kissing His head. Again, she maintains her place at His feet, as a servant or subject might do to a beloved master or king.

Finally, Simon has provided no oil, probably this would have been olive oil, for anointing Jesus' head. In the Old Testament we read of kings and priests being anointed with oil. It also features in Psalm 23. This lady uses an unspecified, fragrant oil to anoint Jesus. The implication is that it is of high value, and something that other people will notice due to the perfume. Once again, the anointing is of Jesus' feet. The picture we are given is of a person who has placed themselves firmly at the feet of Jesus and is happy to stay there, focussing all their attention on Him, and using everything they have at their disposal to indicate their high valuation of Jesus. It is not a stretch to see this as an expression of worship.

Jesus doesn't underplay the woman's guilt, or the number of her sins. He states plainly that her sins are "many." But, rather wonderfully, He says that these many sins are now forgiven. We might read the following phrase, "for she loved much", to be a statement of why those sins had been forgiven, i.e., she was forgiven because she loved Jesus a lot. That doesn't fit well with the rest of what the Bible says about the basis of our forgiveness, or with what the Lord Jesus says Himself a

few verses later about her faith being the cause of her salvation. I think we should read the phrase, “for she loved much” to be a statement about how those present, especially Simon, could see that she was now a forgiven sinner, i.e., she loved much because she had been forgiven much, which is, of course, precisely the point Jesus is seeking to make throughout this exchange.

As has often been noted, the message is **not** that Simon was less of a sinner than the woman of the city. We should not think that only people who lived very wickedly before they were saved can truly love Jesus a lot. The Bible doesn't recognise that kind of league table of guiltiness. The New Testament message is well summarised by Romans 3:23 when it says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Simon, no doubt, had a different set of sins to the woman. Hers were probably sexual, his seem to have centred around pride and arrogance. In reality, both of them were 500 denarii debtors; indeed, all of us are that, no matter how outwardly moral our lives may have been prior to our conversion. The core difference between Simon and the woman is that she recognised her guilt, confessed it, and sought forgiveness; while he tried to maintain his own superiority and failed to take the golden opportunity for salvation of having Jesus for a house guest! Because the woman was all too aware of her own guilt, she was conscious that to be forgiven was to enjoy the writing-off of an incalculable debt, therefore, she loved much and so became a natural worshipper of her Saviour.

I want to take a few minutes now to dig into the subject of what constitutes worship. I find the six questions: what, where, when, how, why and who, that Kipling refers to as “Six honest serving-men” in the poem of the same name, to be very helpful for investigating a whole range of topics, and I will use them now to help us think through the subject of worship.

What is worship?

I'm no linguist, so I am borrowing the following definitions from the scholarship of others. The English word worship derives from an Old English word meaning worth-ship or put another way, an acknowledgement of worth. The Greek New Testament word translated worship means, literally, “to kiss”, as in kissing the hand of a superior. The Old Testament Hebrew word translated worship means to bow down, or fall flat, i.e., to show humility and deference. A modern English dictionary definition is, “The feeling or expression of reverence and adoration for a deity.” You can see how all three of the original definitions work together to produce our modern usage of the word. The sense of humility and littleness before a great God, the kissing of His hand in deference and verbal or physical expressions of our sense of His great worth, are all attributes that we rightly recognise in worship. They are also things that we see expressed in the attitude and actions towards the Lord Jesus of the woman in today's verses. I say again, it is no stretch to describe what she did as worship of her Saviour.

Who can worship?

There is a sense in which anybody who has some appreciation of the greatness of God can offer Him worship. This means that attending a worship service might be a helpful thing for people who are considering Christ and Christianity. But real worship requires real knowledge of God, which is why true worship is for the saved. In John 4:24 Jesus underlines this when He says, “Those who worship [God] must worship in spirit and truth.” That is at the heart of the message Jesus is trying to get across to Simon and anybody else who will listen. At a functional level, Simon could argue that he had much more right to bring Jehovah his worship than this woman had. He was a Jew by birth, an outwardly religious and strictly orthodox Pharisee by practise, and he no doubt attended synagogue and the temple several times every day. But for all this, Simon didn't really have any true knowledge of God, he had no real understanding of his own guiltiness and need, and he could therefore stand in front of Jesus, Jehovah come in the flesh, and criticise Him instead of worshipping. The sinful woman knew that's what she was. She might not have been welcome in the tem-

ple, and she wasn't very welcome in Simon's house, but she was most welcome in the presence of Jesus, and she worshipped Him freely.

How do we worship?

I can think of at least three ways that we can express worship: words, thoughts, and actions.

Words

This is how most of us probably think about worship. Through spoken prayers and sung hymns, we express our appreciation of our Saviour God. We can do so individually or collectively. We can use words that other people have prepared for us, e.g., the lyrics of hymns, or we can use our own words and phrases in prayer. Reading God's word is often a prelude to worship since it reminds us how great He is and what He has done for us. Remembering the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus in the breaking of bread, or eucharist, should regularly lead to worship when we are reminded of His vast love for us and all that it motivated Him to do on our behalf.

Thoughts

Words don't have to be spoken out loud. It is perfectly possible to worship the Lord silently, and there may be occasions when this is more appropriate. In the verses we have read today, there is no record of this woman saying anything, but nobody can seriously doubt that she was worshipping her Saviour. Which brings us to...

Actions

This lady's worship was expressed in her tears, and in her washing, kissing, and anointing of Jesus' feet. We don't have physical access to Jesus in the way that this woman did. But the NIV renders Romans 12:1, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship." This puts the whole way we live our lives in response to God's mercy, in the context of an act of worship. What we do, then becomes an expression of our deep reverence and gratitude to our Saviour. That certainly seems to fit well with the actions of this lady.

When can we worship?

Some of us tend to think of worship as a Sunday morning activity, or something that, at least, requires the services of a designated worship leader. In truth, we can worship at any time and without special equipment, or people. That doesn't mean that communal worship in the church is not important, it is very important indeed, but it is not the **only** expression of worship we have. What we have already said about a life of worship expressed through actions as well as words fits with this 'anytime' concept of worship. Presumably much of this lady's actions took place while Jesus was reclining at the meal table, which is why she had free access to His feet. An unusual timing perhaps, but clearly an acceptable one to Jesus!

Where should we worship?

In the Old Testament proper worship required attendance at the tabernacle or, later, at the temple in Jerusalem. Today no particular location or building is compulsory! Let me emphasise again, that the collective worship of a group of Christians is very important. Hebrews 10:25 reminds us not to forsake "the assembling of ourselves together." As I write this, Christians in the UK are just starting to come out of the lockdown imposed over the COVID19 virus. We have experienced what it means to not be able to assemble together, or to sing together in worship. Online church meetings may have been an important substitute for many of us, but they have lots of disadvantages, and getting back together again is a joyful thing. Let's make sure we maintain our sense of what a blessing this is and remember that one of the most important things we can do together is to

worship the Father and Son. Having said all of that; I repeat that a particular location is not an essential: Simon's house seems to have been a perfectly acceptable venue!

Why do we worship?

That question takes us right back to our definition of worship, and right back to Jesus' message about how those who realise how much they have been forgiven, love much. Ultimately, we worship because of Who and what God is. We worship because we love Him – always remembering that He loved us first. We worship because we have some sense, and hopefully, a growing sense, of the Saviour's worth. We might say that worship is a natural response for a Christian, that is, it is an instinct of the new nature that we receive when we are saved. This lady worshipped because she knew how much she had been forgiven and was filled with love for the person who had given her that forgiveness. As I said at the outset, worship is the proper result of the salvation that the gospel of Christ Jesus brings.

The freedom and joy with which we worship our Saviour is a very good indicator of how healthy our spiritual life is. It isn't hard to work out why that should be so. A healthy spiritual life is one that keeps us in regular, close contact with our Father in heaven. That will ensure that we keep getting to know Him better. It might make us more conscious of our own unworthiness, but it will also remind us of what Jesus' salvation has made us into. A better, living knowledge of God will make us understand more of His worth and greatness, and that has got to result in healthier, more spontaneous, deeper worship. None of which means we need to be in the 'advanced' category of Christians before we can start worshipping! It seems that the lady we are focussing on today was a very new believer, but her worship was both fitting and lovely to see.

Conclusion

I want to draw things to a conclusion by considering the three sentences that Jesus is recorded as saying directly to the woman.

Your sins are forgiven

This unnamed lady really needed to hear that. She was only too aware of her own sinfulness and the distance this had created between her and God. This was the confirmation that her 500 denarii debt had been wiped out. Jesus has already said to Simon that this woman's sins were forgiven, but now he addresses Himself to her personally. We all need to know for ourselves that Jesus has pronounced our sins to be forgiven. We can't really worship without that. Sins prevent us from entering the presence of a holy God. It is only when we know ourselves to be forgiven that we can come confidently and worship our Saviour.

Your faith has saved you

This sentence makes plain the basis of her salvation, indeed of everybody's salvation. She wasn't saved by her love, or her tears, kisses, or anointing. She was saved by faith. Not that faith is something magical. As if we can have anything so long as we believe enough. Faith is what connects us with the saving work of Jesus, His death and resurrection. This woman couldn't know that yet, because Jesus' death on the cross was still in the future. But she trusted Him, and that, or rather He, was the basis of her salvation. It is only by faith that we get to 'see' Jesus today. And, as we have been thinking, seeing, knowing and loving Him are at the very root of worship. We know that we will always be accepted when we come before the throne of God to worship, not because we have performed well that day, but because our Saviour, and faith in Him, have made us acceptable.

Go in peace

I think this is the loveliest, and gentlest, of the three things Jesus says to this lady. She came to Him troubled by her sinfulness. She arrived with a history that was dragging her down. None of the 'respectable' people wanted anything to do with her: she was written off and despised. Peace was the very last thing she was experiencing. Now that Jesus has announced her sins to be forgiven, and her salvation by faith to be accomplished, we might think there is nothing more to add, but Jesus didn't think that way. What this woman needed, what we all need, is a deep down, settled peace. Peace with God, and peace with ourselves, whatever our history might be, and however ashamed of it we are. She had been happy for the time she had spent in Jesus company but now she would have to go back out into the world again and face life, and face all the people who knew all about what she had been until now. As she prepares to go, Jesus tells her she can go in peace. I hear echoes of what Jesus would later say to His disciples in John 14:27, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." The worshipped Saviour speaks words of peace to the person who worships Him. I have no doubt that this lady walked away with a sense of peace that she had never known before. She was leaving the immediate presence of Jesus, but she was taking His peace with her in her heart.

We don't worship for any other reason than because our God is worthy of it and because we love Him; but because worship is about considering and dwelling on His greatness it is always likely to produce the quiet joy and peace that this fortunate lady experienced.

Lord Jesus, You are very definitely worthy of our worship. You are our Creator and our God, and You also became our Saviour. We give thanks for the Gospel that is preached in Your name, and all that it does for those who come to You in faith. We thank you that you are still taking people like the woman we have been thinking about today, and turning them from distant sinners into up-close worshippers. Please keep opening our eyes to see how wonderful both You and the Father are, so that we might learn to worship you more and more, and find our deepest pleasure in doing so, amen.

Thank you for listening to this truth for today talk on The Gospel of Christ Jesus – Luke 7 verses 44 to 50, A Worshipped Saviour, talk number T1216.

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