

[1] All Her Sins Are Forgiven.
Osaka Gospel Meeting, August 21st, 2011
Yoshio Takahashi

『多くの罪を赦された女』、2011年8月21日大阪福音集会、
高橋義夫兄

Luke

7:36 And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat.

7:37 And, look, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment,

7:38 And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

7:39 Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spoke within himself, saying. This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that touches him. for she is a sinner.

7:40 And Jesus answering said to him. Simon. I have somewhat to say to you. And he says, Master, say on.

7:41 There was a certain creditor which had two debtors. the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty.

7:42 And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?

7:43 Simon answered and said. I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said to him. You has rightly judged.

7:44 And he turned to the woman, and said to Simon, see you this woman? I entered into your house, you gave me no water for my feet. but she has washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.

7:45 You gave me no kiss. but this woman since the time I came in has not ceased to kiss my feet.

7:46 My head with oil you did not anoint. but this woman has anointed my feet with ointment.

7:47 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.

7:48 And he said to her. your sins are forgiven.

7:49 And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgives sins also?

7:50 And he said to the woman, your faith has saved you. go in peace.

receive many files every day. I was listening to some of the recorded testimonies yesterday and one thing stuck in my head. In one of these testimonies, Brother Beck talked about the most unpleasant type of person to be with, a type of person that makes him unhappy. What kind of person doesn't he want to be around, do you think? Is it an irritable person? A selfish person? Or someone who wants to control others?

Brother Beck mentioned that the most difficult type of people for him to be with, the type of people who hurt others most, are those who believe that they are righteous. His words stuck in my heart. I thought that this is a common pitfall for Christians. We must have repented when we realized that we were forgiven in front of the cross, but somewhere, we chose the wrong path, and we are now unknowingly justifying ourselves. We may look like good people, but we have actually hurt someone because of it, and thus we have caused Jesus much grief. I suppose the Pharisee, who appeared in the verses quoted above, must have been an example of such people.

When we think of perfume in the Bible, we usually picture the scenes of the perfume of pure nard in Bethany. However, what happened in these verses was supposed to have occurred relatively early in the three and half years Jesus worked in this world, in the Northern area of Israel around the Sea of Galilee. So, it is unlikely that this is the same incident as the perfume of nard. A woman appears in this story who was labeled as a 'sinful woman', presumably because she earned her living through some form of prostitution. Anyway, she was treated with contempt. In contrast, the Pharisee, who threw this home meeting, must have been socially well-esteemed. The story revolves around these three people: Jesus, the sinful woman and the Pharisee.

Let's begin by looking at the Pharisees that appear in this story. Their name, "Pharisee", comes from a word meaning "setting apart". The fundamental principle which they lived by was to isolate themselves from the world that was becoming less secular and to keep themselves pure and clean; this implies that they were originally very sincere and truly faithful to God. However, when the days of Jesus came, their sublime idea became superficial. They became too legalistic and they were criticized by Jesus in many aspects of the New Testament. As we read through the Gospel according to Luke, we see more and more words of Jesus to accuse Pharisees.

I have been serving the assembly by collecting recorded messages and uploading the audio files to our website. I

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The conflicts between Jesus and religious leaders such as the Pharisees or rabbi were becoming more vehement day by day. It was in such a time that this Pharisee named Simon decided to invite Jesus to his home meeting. This makes me believe that Simon had a sincere devotion and strong determination to have Jesus in his home.

Considering the fact that this Pharisee invited Jesus to his home meeting, I imagine that he planned to introduce Jesus to his fellow Pharisees and to listen to what Jesus would speak about: righteousness, important laws and the social situation of those days. It was in such a meeting that this unexpected sinful woman broke in.

This woman presumably earned her living by prostitution, something considered most sinful. But as we keep reading, we find out that that it was not her only problem. Apparently, she did not understand the ceremonious atmosphere of the meeting, and she was acting in a manner inappropriate for the occasion. She also seemed to be emotionally unstable. I guess she slipped into the house hiding behind other women helping to prepare the meeting. As we can see from verse 38, she was already weeping when the meeting began. She also acted very eccentric. She washed Jesus' feet with perfume, wiped them with her hair and kissed His feet.

When Simon planned this home meeting, he must have expected to have some lofty and theological discussions with Jesus. However, what he actually experienced was a strange woman breaking into the meeting and sticking near Jesus. Moreover, Jesus accepted her and allowed her to stay close to him. After we read the whole story, we tend to have a favorable impression of this woman; however, if we were in Simon's shoes, we would probably have shared the frustration he was feeling. We would have felt exactly the same way as him.

Very often, when we hold family meetings, we experience firsthand that humans' thoughts differ from what Jesus intends to happen. We always have some expectations, and we act based on human nature. For example, we may attempt to invite non-believers and choose some elder to converse with that person. However, we are reminded more often that the plans we think are best totally differ from the intentions of Jesus. We always have unexpected visitors with unexpected communions. In some instances, our children get sick or some accidents happen, as if something wants to keep us away from being useful at the home meetings.

Try to imagine this: We devote ourselves and our time for so long to prepare for a home meeting, and the day finally

arrives when we host it. Then, some uninvited weird woman breaks in and starts to pour perfume on the speaker's feet, kisses his feet and then wipes them with her hair. What would we do? I would be so annoyed by her and would try to drive her away from my home. This woman's attitude was so impregnable. She must have believed that this was the one and only chance in her life. This was all the reason she strode into the home, cried her tears, spilled her perfumes and kissed His feet. In those days, Jews had a custom of reclining on a couch when they took meals. So, she was able to easily wipe his feet. I looked up the same verses from another version of the Bible:

Luke[NIV]

7:36 Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table.

7:37 When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume,

7:38 and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

In the English Bible of the New International Version, it is written that Jesus 'reclined at the table', instead of, he 'sat down'. Simon the Pharisee must have been so irritated but showed strong self-control. It could have been because Jesus was there, or because he wanted to impress others by seeming like a generous person. He did not complain, but just whispered in his heart.

Luke

7:39 Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spoke within himself, saying. This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that touches him. for she is a sinner.

But Jesus knew what he was saying in his heart. I suppose that Jesus never misses any of the whispers within our hearts. However, these words that Simon the Pharisee murmured in his heart seem natural and understandable based on common sense. We all might whisper similar things in our hearts when we gather in assemblies.

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If this man was truly sent to spread the word of God and lead the people, his heart ought to be ultimately pure. He should be able to find out who this woman is, and he should not accept this kind of attitude from such a sinful woman. A filthy woman like her should not be permitted in the room of the Lord's meeting. We can't help but empathize with the anguish in Simon's heart.

Because my father used to teach religion in high schools, there are a number of old books on bible study in my house. I read the commentary book on the Gospel according to Luke in the collected works of Professor Tadao Yanaihara, in which the sinful women are often called 'pan-pan'. According to a dictionary, pan-pan was a word used in the post-war period to refer to prostitutes who sold themselves to Allied soldiers and occupation troops. We naturally expect non-believers to repent first and participate in our meetings as decent people. In that sense, we can somewhat understand the feelings behind the whisper of Simon the Pharisee.

Jesus answers to such a feeling in the famous allegory in verse 41, 'whom he forgave most'.

Luke

7:41 There was a certain creditor which had two debtors. the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty.

7:42 And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?

7:43 Simon answered and said. I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said to him. You has rightly judged.

Though we can't help but think that Simon's answer is most reasonable, thinking in this way actually leads us into the rhetoric trap of Jesus. The story hidden behind this allegory is that although the weight of our sins is immeasurable, they can be forgiven regardless—this is simplified to the amount of the debts. Simon could not find a logical answer, he could only say that it was the one who had the larger debt canceled. Surprisingly, Jesus suddenly began to rebuke Simon the Pharisee right after his answer.

Luke

7:44 And he turned to the woman, and said to Simon, see you this woman? I entered into your house, you gave me no water for my feet. but she has washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.

7:45 You gave me no kiss. but this woman since the time I came in has not ceased to kiss my feet.

7:46 My head with oil you did not anoint. but this woman has anointed my feet with ointment.

Jesus rebuked Simon because:

[1] Simon didn't give Him any water for His feet;

[2] Simon gave Him no kiss; and

[3] Simon didn't anoint His head with oil.

Jesus complained to Simon for not showing his affection toward Him. On the other hand, Jesus viewed this sinful woman with highest regard, she who had been treated with contempt by all others.

[1b] This woman washed His feet with her tears and dried them with her hair;

[2b] She did not stop kissing His feet;

[3b] She anointed His feet with perfume.

The game was turned around. Simon, who had been highly esteemed in this world, was now the focus of criticism by Jesus, while the filthy and despised pan-pan who had been rejected from society won the greatest prize of the day. Simon the Pharisee must have been so upset at this unexpected big defeat. A moment ago, he was murmuring because Jesus had accepted such a filthy woman. But he then looked at this sinful woman being praised for her affection for Jesus, while he himself was rebuked for not caring for Jesus at all.

When I come back to the debtors' allegory after reading the whole Bible, I sense a secret message deeply hidden by Jesus in these verses. There was no way for these Pharisees to find out when they were attending this meeting, but what Jesus wanted to make clear was that not even one person was truly righteous; this later appears in the Epistle to the Romans, Chapter 3, Verse 10;

Romans

3:10 As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:

3:11 There is none that understands, there is none that seeks after God.

3:12 They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable. there is none that does good, no, not one.

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Once, I heard a story about a missionary. When he spoke in the sisters' meeting, he used to cite this verse, verse 3:10 from the epistles to Romans, but he intentionally misread it. Instead of saying, "Not even one person is righteous (Gijin)", he said "Not even one person is beautiful (Bijin)". It made the sisters upset. What an obnoxious speaker! I guess all the attendees must have felt so. All women, although they don't think they look as good as movie stars, believe that they are not so bad. They think, "I must look at least better than this lady sitting right next to me." But they were all so astonished when they were told that not even one of them was beautiful.

The same holds true for the relationship between ourselves and righteousness. We know that we are not totally righteous, but at the same time, we compare ourselves to others and somewhat admire ourselves. I dislike someone, but have never tried to hurt them. I take care of these people, and I help those people. Am I not a good believer? We end up boasting ourselves unknowingly. This is where we are dazzled by Jesus. He uses the debtors' allegory to lead us to the truth by ourselves—the truth that we are all broke with an enormous debt of sin, which not even one of us can repay.

It was actually not a comparison between Mr. 50-pence and Mr. 500-pence. We are all left standing with a huge amount of debt which is impossible to be repaid. This story is telling us that as we recognize how huge the debts are, we will come to understand how great the forgiveness is. In one aspect, I think that all kinds of sins arise from the lack of love in the relationship with God and with other people.

I encountered Jesus when I was 18 years old. I feel inside that after having been believers for so many years, people are actually prone to be conceited and arrogant rather than grow as Christians. Every time I say that it has been already several decades since I knew Jesus, I do sense inside my heart that I am boasting about it. In a sense, I am becoming like Simon the Pharisee.

This is true not only among Christians. This year, I associated with many non-Christians, including members of the neighborhood association for which I served as the sub-principal. Sometimes I found myself feeling superior for believing in the Lord and looking down on those who didn't know God. We forget so easily that Jesus has redeemed us from the debts we could have never paid. Jesus disciplines us every day so that we remember the truth in front of the cross.

Very often, in various aspects of our daily lives, for example, in caring for elderly persons, we are made to realize that we are so apathetic to others and only care about ourselves. Once, I was also reminded of my own heartlessness. I remember that on one of such occasions, in the very last days of the life of someone important to me, I was preoccupied with the arrangements of the funeral ceremony and the like. Lately, I regret it because if, back then, I was like what I am now, I would have celebrated him because he was going to meet Jesus soon. I could have sent him up to heaven peacefully from a hospital room full of love. Since I was a little child, I have suffered many serious diseases and some other hard experiences; these have kept me confident and from breaking down so easily. It was a fresh surprise that I broke down that way. These experiences clearly showed me that I was such an egoistic and heartless person filled with sin while I was making a desperate effort not to break down.

The words of one sister in her testimony at the New Year's Gathering at Miyota made a strong impression on me. She was talking about one's relationship with other believers. One sister went right up to the speaker and said she was hurt by the speaker. The speaker asked her what she did to hurt the sister, but she wouldn't say. She tried very hard to recollect, but she could not see how she had hurt that sister. So the speaker prayed to Jesus and asked Him to tell her what she had done to the sister. Jesus' answer was that it was not what she had done, but that just being there was the sin. That part of her testimony still remains in my heart.

Through the debtors' allegory, I think that Jesus is trying to remind us the weight of the sins we were forgiven of. One sister had serious marital problems, and she thought she couldn't forgive her husband. This sister went to see Mr. Beck and complain about her husband. Brother Beck's answer was that although she was 99 percent right and her husband was 99 percent wrong, 1 percent of the problems may have been her fault. After that, she was finally able to open her mind and apologize to Jesus, then apologize to her husband as well. In the words "1 percent" that Brother Beck used, I sense the same deeply hidden meaning as in the debtors' allegory made by Jesus.

We can tell very well when the lives of others are being disrupted. When others are having family problems, we soon find out. However, when our own family is in crisis, we very often do not see it until Jesus comes and shakes our shoulders. We do not know that we are very much like the travel merchant who was assaulted by the bandits and seriously wounded, as we learned in the story of good Samaritan. But I think, actually, that everything starts there. We have to return to that point. We hardly understand the true meaning of Isaiah, Chapter 53, Verse

5, but this is where our faith should always start.

Isaiah

53:5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities. the chastisement of our peace was upon him. and with his stripes we are healed.

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This is today's last point. These are the words Jesus repeatedly spoke.

Luke
7:48 And he said to her. your sins are forgiven.
7:49 And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgives sins also?
7:50 And he said to the woman, your faith has saved you. go in peace.

Your faith has saved you. Jesus said exactly the same thing to the woman who had been suffering from chronic bleeding.

Luke
8:48 And he said to her. Daughter, be of good comfort. your faith has made you whole. go in peace.

To one of the ten lepers who came back to see Jesus, He said:

Luke
17:19 And he said to him. Arise, go your way. your faith has made you whole.

To the blind man in Jericho:

Luke
18:42 And Jesus said to him. Receive your sight. your faith has saved you.

These verses are translated into similar, very simple Japanese sentences. I suspected that there must be some hidden meaning behind them. I looked up the original Bible written in Greek using the Bible software I mentioned before. But, actually, it was truly simple sentence.

Η ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΣΟΥ ΣΕΩΚΕΝ ΣΕ
The – faith - of yours – did save – you.

This sentence is so straight forward. There is no place to hide secrets. It consists of such simple words. I think that the Bible is wonderful because each reader can find personal messages from Jesus. While I was preparing this sermon, I kept asking what Jesus was telling me through these words. Then, there was an answer straight into my heart: you were saved just because you believed in me.

I also heard Jesus ' voice saying that He had been waiting for me to trust Him and to ask for His help. I thought that

Jesus is always waiting for us to give up relying on empty societies or human efforts, but to entrust everything to Him. As Brother Beck keeps telling us, Jesus is the one who desperately wants to forgive us, desperately wants to save us. He is always waiting for us to look up Him and ask for His help.

Then, we will have his words: go in peace. To the leper, he said, "Rise and go your way." Jesus is sending his words toward us, those who still cannot totally entrust ourselves to Him but are always worrying about everything; 'lekhi beshalom', go in peace.

Simon the Pharisee was still far away from his salvation at this time. He believed that he was not like that filthy woman. However, Jesus declared that all her sins were forgiven, and that she, the filthy woman, was saved. It was simply because she understood that she was a sinner who had debts she could never pay and asked for Jesus' help.

As we can see from many testimonies, so many difficulties are brought into our lives to draw us closer to Jesus. My son is in trouble. My daughter is in trouble. My husband is in trouble. My wife is in trouble. My grandmother is in trouble. They go to see Brother Beck or some other brothers or sisters to get some advice. When they do, there is one thing common in all the answers: it is not your son, not your daughter, not your husband, not your wife, not your grandmother, but you that is causing the problem. They are all told that they must repent and come to the cross.

When we come to know this, we should start to pray this way: "Jesus, I am a sinner. I have been walking in selfishness. I hurt so many people. I never looked at you and caused you a grief. My debts of sins are so heavy that I can never pay. Please forgive me today and be my savior." If you can pray this way, Jesus would absolutely tell you: go in peace. Your sins are all forgiven.