

# A woman in the city, which was a sinner (Quality: Good)

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 02 November 1988

Preacher: Mercer, Seth (1930-2017)

[ 0 : 00 ] I need help to be enabled to venture with a word that you will find in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 7, the first part of verse 37.

The Gospel of Luke, chapter 7, reading the first part of verse 37. And behold, a woman in the city which was a sinner.

And behold, a woman in the city which was a sinner.

The Lord alone knows how such truth as this will affect our hearts this evening.

I would that everyone that is here, including my own heart, might be made truly aware, at least in the measure that the Lord may grant concerning this truth in our own hearts.

[ 1 : 32 ] And I know that there are those here who will feelingly answer within, yes, this truth is true of me.

There's no other word that will describe your case more clearly than this.

And behold, a woman in the city which was a sinner. This, dear friends, is very vital truth.

It is truth which is so much withheld in the day in which we live. Because I am sure of this, that the deeper our knowledge of sin in our own hearts before God, the greater will be our felt need of a Saviour.

The sacred meaning to the very name of Jesus is attractive to hell-deserving sinners.

[ 2 : 59 ] And what do we read? It's recorded in this. Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.

Now I have said and repeat this thought. I know that gracious conviction of sin is so withheld in these solemn days in which we live.

Now, do not misunderstand me. I know there are those here who have been feelingly made aware of this in your own heart by the teaching of the Spirit.

But it is certainly truth that we so need the Lord to grant in our land. Have we ever really considered this thought that when God sent an unwilling Jonah to the great city of Nineveh and with a very short sermon, that is, as it is recorded in God's Word, what a short sermon it was.

It was a great city, a three days journey. Of course, we need to think of it in the light of those days when people would have walked from one end, as it were, to the other.

[ 4 : 33 ] But if we just think for a moment of the way in which Jonah was directed to speak to that great city, yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

As I understand it, he would have gone on and on and on, as long as was needed, and would have kept continuing in proclaiming that truth.

And it came from God. Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown. We certainly know there was an effect. It was a God-given effect.

And yet we are... The people of Nineveh were brought to repentance. Of course, we do not know the effect of it, as it were, in their hearts as in the sight of God concerning their never-dying souls.

And whether it did indeed last. But we know this, that God wrought this through Jonah's preaching.

[ 5 : 49 ] And how we need the Lord in mercy to grant such a blessing in our land, if it could please him.

It must come from him. But it's the only thing, by and through the Spirit's power, that will bring us as a nation from the throne downward, into the dust, and into repentance before God.

Well, how we need this. We do not know whether the Lord will grant it. But it is certainly needed. Because iniquity increases on every hand.

Now we must come to this subject. And behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner. Now if indeed we know something of this truth in our hearts, by the teaching of the Spirit, we shall have been taught this, I believe.

First of all, this is how I must seek to bring it before you. That first of all, that we are sinners, in our own hearts. We are sinners in our own hearts.

[ 7 : 19 ] It is heart sins that I know are the greatest concern to the living family of God.

Upon my heart the burden lies, and past offences pain my eyes. Quite recently I was speaking to one of God's servants, and although it was very searching what he said, and yet I felt, oh, how I need this, how we need this, and the Lord favoured him.

And I look upon it as a favour, a God-given favour, but he said how his sins, just continually, as it were, rose up before his eyes.

Sin after sin was brought home upon his heart. I know that God is a sovereign in this. He is a sovereign in his dealings with every one of his people.

But I know this, dear friends, if we have been truly convinced of sin before God, it will have so affected our heart.

[ 8 : 37 ] It will be your heart sins. It will be your greatest trouble. The sins of our hearts. William Cowper, in one of his hymns, he puts it like the power of sin within the heart, and this is what he said, concerning it, I know them.

That is the monstrous host that dwells within. The cursed train of unbelief and sin. But he said, I know them. And friends, if we know something of heart sins, we shall have to say this evening before our God, I know them.

We shall know them in the measure that the Spirit of God has revealed them to us. I know them, and if we do, we shall go on with what he says in that hymn, I know them, and I hate their death.

I hate their death. Am weary of the bustling crowd. We have been singing of the Lord's dear people knowing weariness.

But what is it that so constantly creates this weariness within the heart? What is it by the Spirit's teaching that will drive us to the Lord Jesus?

[ 10 : 01 ] In his own words, Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. But what is it then that does so weary the Lord's people?

It is sin. It is the rage of sin within our hearts. And do you find it that it is with you an everyday thing?

Not always to the same extent. But is there a night that you retire to rest without an awareness of your sins? without the God-given awareness of how you sin yet again through another day?

But we shall indeed know something of what William Cowper knew. I know them and I hate their den. Am weary of the bustling crowd.

We shall be weary of the bustling crowd. It will affect our hearts. It will affect our bodies. It will affect our mind.

[ 11 : 12 ] It will affect our whole life from time to time. And while their voice is heard within, I cannot serve thee as I would.

And behold, take notice of this. And behold, a woman in the city which was a sinner.

Now we've mentioned heart sins. But then there will be the sins of our lives. To those of us here tonight that are parents with our children.

And if the Lord shines into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, oh how many times we've sinned in this respect with our families.

The sins of our home life. The things that go on there. Which the Lord knows.

[ 12 : 17 ] The way that we live in our lives at home. And all that that means. And if we think of just this one day and even in the conversation that we may have held with people, those of you here tonight who go forth from day to day in your daily calling and you may have met with different people today.

But if we are brought to consider this, oh how much sin there has been mixed up with it. How much sin there is mixed up with our conduct and our conversation.

Oh how many times the living family of God are brought to such a point as this and that we wish that we could withdraw what we have said.

We wish that we hadn't said things. And yet this goes on, does it not, in our life. And what does the Bible tell us in one particular place to me, I'm speaking to my own heart first of all here, but the thought, think of it, the thought of foolishness is said.

The thought of foolishness is said. And the Lord Jesus in another place he tells us this, that every idle word that men speak they must give an account of in the day of judgment.

[ 13 : 55 ] Well how many idle words do we utter? How many idle words have we uttered? What is an idle word? Surely it is words that we utter that have no true meaning as it were.

There's nothing really in them. So then there will be indeed the sins of our hearts, the sins of our lives, the sins of our home life, the sins of our daily life, the sins in our business life, the sins in our daily calling to those of you here tonight that are in business.

I'm sure that as the Spirit of God shines into your hearts, as you reflect about these things, oh how many times sin has been, as it were, mixed, as I believe it was John Newton puts it, sin is mixed with all I do.

Do we not have to say amen to that? The sins in our business life and all that that means, there is all the different things that need to be conducted in business life.

And yet, how often sin is just so mixed up with it. Sin is mixed with all I do. And then what does John Newton say in that hymn?

[ 15 : 25 ] He says this, tell me, tell me, ye or you who love the Lord, tell me, is it thus with you? I know that the Lord's people are brought sometimes to feel, and they do feel it, that they are the chief of sinners.

People have often said to me, when I've been in their company, oh if you knew really what I was like, what a sinner I am, you'd want nothing to do with me.

I'm sure many of us have had to feel like that. And what a mercy it is in that sense that others do not know. And yet, the solemn point is that the Lord knows.

And so, there are the sins of our lives. And all that that means. So then, this is how we have felt that we must attempt to bring this subject before you this evening.

in the first instance, and behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner. The wonder of it is that she knew this.

[ 16 : 43 ] That is very evident from what follows. But she knew this. It was something she knew. We are not told in what particular way she had been a sinner.

I would feel that it is evident from the record here that it could well have been in some particular way. But the Bible is silent on this.

But it is certainly true as it's recorded here, which was a sinner. And yet, she had been brought to repentance.

repentance. I am sure of this, that she had been brought to repentance. Otherwise, she would not have acted in the way that she did.

And before we come to this, we would make another thing clear that is recorded here, and that is that the Lord Jesus was invited into the home or the house of a Pharisee.

[ 17 : 57 ] Now, he didn't say that he wouldn't go. The Lord help us just to think of this for a moment. Here, the Lord Jesus condescended to go into the home of a Pharisee.

house and surely the record that we have here reveals that this man was unaware that he was a sinner. A complete contrast to this poor and yet blessed woman.

He was unaware that he was a sinner. And yet, the Lord condescended to go into that man's home. And he went into the Pharisee's house and sat down to me.

how, to my understanding, there was a divine purpose in this. And so, as we read through the Gospels, we find that everywhere that the Lord Jesus went, there was a divine purpose.

Because he must meet with souls that he would bless. There were many that took no notice of what he said, but there were those to whom he must go.

[ 19 : 12 ] There were those that he must bless. And so, here, he goes into this Pharisee's house. And then what? And behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner.

Now, she knew this. She would be made aware of this. And what did it do for her? When she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment.

In this sacred account that we have before us, here we have this poor trembling woman, knowing that she was a sinner, and coming into this very house, and coming because she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house.

Now, what a wonderful thing this is. What a wonderful thing it is to be brought to Jesus. Now, it is sinners can say, and none but they have, precious is the Saviour.

We have this same truth recorded in a number of places, that is, I mean, of sinners coming to Christ. We have the account of the poor woman who for twelve long years had been suffering as she had, and had spent all her living on many physicians, but rather grew worse.

[ 20 : 56 ] Now, there again, that is a description of what sin is and its effect within the heart, we shall feel to grow worse. I feel I could sincerely say that after nearly twenty years or more of standing in this pulpit, I feel to be a greater sinner than ever.

A greater sinner than ever. That is how I find it in my own life, as we grow older, and I believe it is so, that the Lord makes his people aware of this more and yet more, what vile, wretched sinners they are.

And yet, you see, it is for sinners, Lord, thou camest to bleed, and I am a sinner, vile indeed.

So it was for sinners, Lord, thou camest to bleed. it was for such souls as this person here, this woman. And so she comes into this Pharisee's house, and there the Lord was going not only to bless her, with the greatest blessing I feel that any poor sinner can ever receive, and what is it?

She was to receive the pardon of her sins. she was to receive this. And yet, it was to be in this Pharisee's house.

[ 22 : 27 ] It was to be in the presence of this man. It was to be in the presence of this man, who declares this in verse 39, now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, that is, the way in which this dear woman came to the Lord Jesus, the way that she acted, the way that she was affected.

Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spoke within himself. But you see, the Lord Jesus knew what he was thinking, and the Lord Jesus still knows what we're thinking.

He knows just what goes on in the hearts of sinners. We may be able to hide things from loved ones or others, but we can hide nothing from the Lord.

And the Lord knew what was going on in this Pharisee's heart. 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 toucheth him, for she is a sinner.

sinner. You see how readily he speaks about her, for she is a sinner. But surely the thing we need to notice is this, he, that is the Pharisee, was unaware of the fact that he was a sinner.

[ 24 : 02 ] He didn't know that he was a sinner. And he looked with disdain upon this poor woman. he looked upon her and as he said, for she is a sinner.

And the effect of it upon his mind was this, that he thought within himself she had no right to do what she did. Well the Lord help us to look at least a little into what she was favoured to do.

She comes with her alabaster box of ointment. But what does she first of all do? Dear friends, here we have, I feel, a description of what true conviction of sin will do to a sinner.

We have what it will do in bringing poor sinners to repentance as they are compelled to come to Jesus.

Now how did she come and what did she do? First of all there's this, and stood at his feet behind him weeping.

[ 25 : 19 ] Now you may not be able to understand this in the sense that if Jesus was sitting at meat, then how could she stand behind him, behind and stood at his feet behind him weeping?

Well as I understand it, it means this. The way that they would have sat in those days particularly means that they would have sat with their feet as it were behind them.

This is very evident from what is recorded here. But here we find her and stood at his feet behind him weeping.

Now may we notice the humility, the tenderness of this dear woman's heart. She didn't go in front of him, she didn't presume, she was a poor sinner.

And yet she'd been brought to my understanding to love him. And it was love that moved her. It was love that moved her to stand at his feet behind him weeping.

[ 26 : 40 ] And it was because of an awareness of her sins before him that made her weep. And there she stood behind him weeping. Well, dear friends, if we know something of what real conviction of sin is, it will certainly make us weep.

And when I say this, I would go as it were a little further in this thought because heart weeping, while I know that it will often be accompanied with literal tears, and yet I also believe this, there are times in the life of a poor sinner when their heart aches with sin, and there's this heart weeping before their Lord because of their sins.

But I know this, that real conviction of sin will certainly be accompanied with heart weeping, weeping as it were in our hearts, and weeping literally literally before the Lord.

I wonder how many of us here tonight have known even a little of this, we have wept before the Lord on account of our sins. You've had to weep before him.

And not only as it were under the agony and the anguish of gracious conviction of sin, and that will make us weep, but also when we are brought by the love of Christ to sit at his feet, and we have a hymn that puts it like this, love and grief, my heart dividing, love and grief, my heart dividing, with my tears, his feet I'll bathe, constant still in faith abiding, life deriving from his death.

[ 28 : 58 ] So then true conviction of sin will certainly bring us to his dear feet. We shall know what it is to weep, we shall know something of this that she knew, but not only did she stand at his feet behind him weeping.

You see the contrast between her and this Pharisee. Oh, the contrast between these two. One of them had never known what it was to weep, and yet this dear woman knew what it was.

And not only did she weep as she stood at his feet behind him, but then there's this, and began to wash his feet with tears.

To wash his feet with tears. You may say in your heart there may be those here, perhaps many of us, will perhaps respond like this in our hearts at this point.

Oh, have I ever known anything of this? Have I ever known what it is? to wash his feet with tears. And I'm sure that the Lord's people do know something of this.

[ 30 : 23 ] She washed his feet with her tears. See, where the Lord brought her, she brings him to his feet. And so the Lord brings sinners to his feet.

And then we read this, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head. Now, if we just think of it like this, a woman's hair is her glory.

A woman's hair is her glory. That is why we believe it right. we know that in different parts of the world there are different customs and different ways.

But in our own land, we like to see, we are glad to see, a woman with her head covered.

heart. And that because it is, apart from anything else, an act of reverence. It is an act of reverence before God.

[ 31 : 38 ] Because a woman's glory is her hair. And to cover her hair, to cover her head, is an act of reverence. Just as much as it is with the men who come into the house of God with their heads bared.

And that with a man is also an act of reverence. It is something that we do. A man will bear his head. A woman will cover her head.

And that because it is an act of reverence. It is, if we do it rightly, it is done as an act of reverence to God. That is why we seek to do it.

That is why one believes it to be right. But the thing is this, that here she 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.

If we think of it then like this, here was this dear woman using her hair for woman's glory. She was using her hair to wipe his feet.

[ 32 : 56 ] But what an act of sacred reverence and godly fear we have in this. She wiped his feet with her hair.

Could anything be recorded in God's word that sets before us the humility and the love that here this dear woman was willing to use her hair to wipe the Lord Jesus' feet.

But this is what she did. And then there's something else. And kissed his feet. what a revelation of what the Lord can do for sinners to bring them into such a place.

And she kissed his feet. She kissed his feet. Here we have the Lord of life and glory, the eternal Son of God in human flesh.

And yet here this dear woman is brought to him. She stands behind him weeping. She washes his feet with tears. You may feel that you've never done this, but oh, if the Lord should, as it were, grant a revelation to one or another here tonight, I believe you'll say, well, I do know a little of this.

[ 34 : 25 ] Because when we are brought to weep, as it were, at his dear feet, we weep tears of repentance, we weep tears of godly sorrow, we weep tears of love.

And I believe there are those here tonight who've known just a little of this. With my tears, his feet I'd bathed. Constant, still in faith, abiding.

And of course, here she had that wondrous, precious gift of faith. She had the gift of faith. She had the gift of hope because otherwise she wouldn't have come into the house.

She certainly had the gift of love. It was love that moved her. And then we are told, and anointed them, that is, his feet with the ointment.

She brings this ointment and anoints his feet with the ointment. and here I believe she is, as it were, revealing that as she anointed his feet with this ointment, so she acknowledges that he is the anointed of the Father, full of grace and truth.

[ 35 : 50 ] She acknowledges this in this action of love. she acknowledges that he is the anointed of the Father, full of grace and truth.

And her love was such to him. And why? Because, apart from anything else, of what he had done for her. And friends, if we've been brought as sinners to his dear feet, if we've had to weep, as it were, before him, and if we've known, although you may feel I know nothing of this, and yet may the Lord show you this evening that you do.

And he wiped them with the hairs of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. And then the Lord, as it were, speaks to Simon.

He says that if this man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him, for she is a sinner. And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee, and he saith, Master, say on.

You know, the Bible tells us that there will be many who take up such words as these and say, Lord, Lord, and yet in the day of judgment it will be said to them, I never knew you.

[ 37 : 20 ] Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity. Many people take up these sacred names, they will call him Lord, they will call him Master, and yet they know nothing in their hearts.

This man certainly didn't. He didn't know anything of what the Lord Jesus was, but this dear woman did. And it was all wrought within her heart by sovereign grace.

But then the Lord says, there was a certain creditor which had two debtors, the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty, and then we have this, and when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both.

Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Well, even this Pharisee knew what the answer was. Simon answered and said, I suppose, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most, and he said unto him, thou hast rightly judged.

Now, in closing then this evening, whatever any of you may feel that you do not have, and yet, is there that within our hearts that longs to know these things for ourselves?

[ 38 : 44 ] Do we long to know these things for ourselves? But I hope and believe there are those that will be able to come in with this thought.

As we think of what the Lord said, there was one owed 500 and the other 50, and when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both.

Well, can you come in there? Do you feel to be a 500 pence debtor? Do you feel to be a 50 pence debtor?

Whatever we may feel, what a thought it is, and when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. And that is where the Lord brings his people.

We shall know this, that we've got nothing to pay. we've got nothing of our own, we shall certainly come with that beautiful hymn of top ladies, and we shall often have to say, nothing in my hand I bring, yet you will long to go on in that that follows, simply to thy cross I cling, naked come to thee for dress, helpless look to thee for grace, black I to the fountain fly, wash me saviour, or I die.

[ 40 : 10 ] Now in closing then, what does the Lord say to her? And he said unto her, thy sins are forgiven, thy sins are forgiven.

Amen. hymn 1109, come weary souls with sin distressed, come and accept the promised rest, the gospel's gracious call Her God but the son of the name of theraph Originally, the holy song More Afraid Yes of He Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[ 44 : 24 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Lord, thou knowest that our closing hymn, we trust, was given through that one line found in the last verse, forgiveness shed through every breath, every heart.

O Lord, do grant this. Do pardon all that thy pure eyes have seen amiss. We have ventured with thy word.

O Lord, do own and bless it. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God with the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Amen.■c