

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Third Sunday after Trinity, June 12, 2016

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 389, 386:1, 380, 321, 386:2-5.
Lessons: Psalm 51, 2 Corinthians 7:6-10, Luke 19:1-10.
Sermon Text: Luke 7:36-50.
Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

In Christ Jesus our Savior dear friends:

The clear teaching of the Bible regarding salvation and works is summed up in this little sentence: “Christian people are not saved because they do good works, they do good works because they have been saved.” That seems like such a simple truth that anyone would be able to understand. Yet, such is not the case. The majority of people in this world believe that they can be saved by their works. The Christian poet, Isaac Watts, teaches the truth of the matter in this hymn verse:

“Tis not by works of righteousness
Which our own hands have done,
But we are saved by God's free grace
Abounding through His Son.”
(The Lutheran Hymnal 382:3)

This is an essential truth which we hear when the gospel is preached in its truth and purity. It is also something we are to think about before attending the Lord’s Supper. For in this means of grace we are not offered a reward for being good. Rather, we receive the assurance of forgiveness of sins for Jesus’ sake as a free gift of God’s love. Let us study this matter further as we hear our text and consider

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WORK-RIGHTEOUSNESS AND THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

- 1. The self-righteous believe their own theory that works of love earn God’s favor and forgiveness;**
- 2. The humble Christian believes the Bible teaching that forgiveness of sins results in works of love.**

“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.” We do not know the motive of the Pharisee in inviting Jesus. We do know the Pharisees were very critical of Jesus and not friendly. This invitation may have been a friendly gesture to begin with, but it ended up with a condemnation of Jesus.

Our text tells us what happened during the meal: *“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, 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.”* This sinful woman had come to faith in Jesus on some prior occasion. She was truly sorry for her sins. She showed her faith by her humble works of love. With the tears that fell on Jesus’ feet she washed his feet, then dried them with her hair, and finally anointed his feet with a costly perfume.

But this act of love was a revolting scene to the Pharisee who had invited Jesus to dine. *“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.’”* The Pharisee regarded Jesus with

contempt because he had allowed the former sinful woman to touch him. Because of this self-righteous attitude the Pharisee did not think of Jesus as being a prophet, much less the Son of God. How little self-righteous people really know about the Savior and what the Savior says of himself! He says ***“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”*** Luke 19:10 (NIV)

Though the Pharisee did not speak out loud, the Lord knew his thoughts. In order to rebuke the Pharisee’s self-righteous attitude, Jesus told a parable to him. When the Pharisee had agreed to listen to Jesus teaching, Jesus said ***“Two men 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 canceled the debts of both.”*** A denarius was a coin worth about a day’s wages at that time. The point that Jesus wanted the Pharisee named Simon to pay attention to especially was that the kindly creditor forgave the one man ten times as much as the other. So Jesus asked Simon: ***“Now which of them will love him more?”*** Simon replied, ***‘I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled.’***

The Pharisee gave the right answer, and then Jesus proceeded to apply the parable to him. ***“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. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.”*** Not only did Simon the Pharisee show no love to Jesus, he did not even show the common courtesies extended to guests according to Jewish custom. But the penitent woman had done all these things in a far more wonderful way, and in this way showed her great love for Jesus.

Then Jesus made the most important application: ***“Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven--for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.”*** This is the most important verse of our text, first of all because it states an important truth, and also because this verse has been so misused by the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman church refers to this verse, Luke 7:47, as the basis for their teaching that faith alone is not enough for salvation, but that faith plus works justifies. They say that the former sinful woman was forgiven because she showed so much love for Jesus. That conclusion can be drawn from Jesus words if we take just that one sentence and pay no attention to what other passages say. That is a misuse of the Bible. For to put this meaning on a passage would be to contradict many other clear Bible passages which tell us that we cannot earn forgiveness by works of love. The apostle Paul writes: ***“it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.”*** Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV)

Let us look again at what Jesus said: ***“her many sins have been forgiven--for she loved much.”*** To say that the woman was forgiven and saved because of her great love for Jesus is wrong. Here is an example to make this clear: We say that wet soil is proof that it has rained. We do not say that wet soil is the reason why it rained. There is a difference between the reason for a thing and the proof for a thing. Rain causes wetness, not wetness the rain. So works of love are the result of forgiveness, not the reason for it.

Despite this, the Roman church continues to use the verse in our text as proof for their false teaching of work-righteousness. But we are also in danger of thinking in a self-righteous way. It has been said that there is a little Pharisee within each of us. That is, according to our natural, sinful way of reasoning, we think that God should be pleased with our works and therefore forgive us. Or, we can think that we can worthily attend the Lord’s Supper because we are good enough Christians! But that is work-righteousness whenever we think that God is pleased with us because we have tried to lead a decent life. God is pleased with us because of one reason only – Jesus has by his work of redemption earned forgiveness for us. And when we believe in Jesus, then we will want to serve the Lord with our works to show our love for him.

We now want to learn from our text that the humble Christian believes the Bible teaching that forgiveness of sins results in works of love.

2.

Once again we hear what Jesus said of the former sinful woman: ***“Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven--for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.”*** The penitent woman showed such great love for Jesus because she had been forgiven so much. She had been an outcast from society because of her sins. She deserved God’s anger and everlasting punishment in hell. But she had come to a

knowledge of salvation through Christ. She had heard the gospel and by the grace of God believed this truth as Paul wrote it: ***“God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them.”*** 2 Corinthians 5:19 (NIV) The woman by the grace of God believed this truth also as Paul later wrote: ***“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*** 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV)

How was it that this woman believed these truths? Only by the grace of God. The Holy Spirit worked this faith through the hearing of the gospel, for the Bible says ***“No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.”*** 1 Corinthians 12:3 (NIV) And Paul also says: ***“faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”*** Romans 10:17 (NIV)

It was this faith in Jesus that resulted in such great love for Jesus. Her tears flowed freely as she penitently stood behind Jesus as he was reclining at the table. With her tears she wet Jesus feet, and then humbly loosened her hair and wiped Jesus feet with them. Then she kissed Jesus’ feet over and over again and anointed them with a valuable fragrant perfume. She felt nothing was too good for her Savior. She was willing to use the valuable perfume to anoint Jesus feet.

To show our love for our Savior because he has done so much for us in suffering and dying for our sins should also be our heart’s desire. And that’s where works of love come in as a part of a Christian’s life. John writes ***“We love because he first loved us.”*** 1 John 4:19 (NIV) First there has to be faith in Jesus for sins forgiven, then works of love will result. Paul says ***“For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*** Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)

When Jesus had finished speaking to the Pharisee, he turned to the woman and assured her ***“Your sins are forgiven.”*** And even though the guests in the Pharisee’s house murmured about Jesus saying this, he also assured the woman: ***“Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”*** To each of us who hears the blessed gospel, and by the grace of God humbly repents and trusts in Christ, the Lord says the same thing: ***“Your sins are forgiven. ... go in peace.”*** This is the precious comfort which the Gospel in Word and sacrament gives to us.

Having this precious comfort, May the Lord work in our hearts this result:

“Thee will I love, my Life, my Savior,
Who art my best and truest Friend;
Thee will I love and praise forever,
For never shall Thy kindness end;
Thee will I love with all my heart,
Thou my Redeemer art.” Amen. (The Lutheran Hymnal 399:2)

Reprinted from a Ministry By Mail sermon preached July 29, 1984.