

The Release from Debt

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we're going to turn now to our Bible reading this morning, which you'll find in Luke's gospel. We're studying this gospel at the moment, and we come this morning to Luke chapter 7, and reading at verse 36. Luke 7, verse 36. Remember Luke 7 and 8, as we said last time, is a section that stands together where Luke is putting together for us in his carefully ordered account. Different views, pictures of the wonders of the salvation that Jesus brings. We saw last time how the ultimate answer that the salvation of God brings is not a problem merely of this world, but it is addressing the problem of death itself, and these marvelous pictures of the dead. Raised to life, and Jesus explaining that that is what he has come to do, not only to resuscitate to mortal life, but to bring everlasting life. And today at verse 36, we turn to another wonderful picture of salvation. Salvation as release, liberation from debt, from the debt of sin.

Jesus comes to release from our past and to guide us into a future which is transformed in the service of the Lord Jesus. And that's what these verses are all about. So let's read at chapter 7, verse 36.

In fact, let me read in from verse 34, and the criticism that many said of Jesus and his work. The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, look at him, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

Yet, says Jesus, wisdom, the wisdom of God is justified by all her children. And here's an example. One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went to the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And look, a woman of the city who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment. And standing behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now, when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, if this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is, who's touching him, for she's a sinner. And Jesus answering said to him, Simon, I have something to say to you. And he answered, say it, teacher. A certain moneylender had two debtors, one owed 500 denarii and the other 50. When they could not pay, he canceled the debts of both.

Now, which of them will love him more? Simon answered, the one, I suppose, for whom he canceled the larger debt. And he said to him, you've judged rightly. Then turning to the woman, he said to Simon, do you see this woman? I entered your house. You gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in, she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.

[3 : 3 3] Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much. But he who's forgiven little, loves little. And he said to her, your sins have been forgiven.

Those who were at a table with him began to say among themselves, who is this who even forgives sins? And he said to the woman, your faith has saved you. Go in peace.

Soon afterward, he went on through the cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God and the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities. Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chusa, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others who provided for them out of their means. And when a great crowd was gathered, and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable, a sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. And some fell into good soil and grew

and yielded a hundredfold. And he said these things, as he said these things, he called out, he who has ears to hear, let him hear. And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, he said, to you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand. Now the parable is this, the seed is the word of God.

The ones along the path are those who have heard, and the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root. They believe for a while, and in a time of testing, fall away. And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way, they're choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. As for that in the good soil, they are like those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience, or better, with endurance. No one, after lighting a lamp, covers it with a jar, or puts it under a bed, or puts it on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light. But nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light. Take care, then, how you hear. For to the one who has, more will be given. And for the one who has not, even what he thinks he has will be taken away. Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they couldn't reach him because of the crowd. And he was told, your mother and your brothers are standing outside desiring to see you. But he answered them, my mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it. Amen. May God bless to us his word.

Well, turn with me, if you would, to Luke's Gospel, chapter 7. And we're looking at this section that we read from verse 36 through to chapter 8, verse 21.

[7 : 25] In Luke 7, verse 23, you'll remember Jesus says about John the Baptist and his followers, blessed is the one who is not offended by me. Well, we live in a culture today, don't we, where people love to take offense and get offended incredibly easily. And with today's media, of course, that offense is very quickly aired worldwide immediately on Twitter, the medium that someone has called the electronic lavatory wall for the emotionally incontinent. I wonder what the former shadow attorney general thinks of Twitter this morning. But I read a striking article this week by former minister Campbell Jack commenting on the great news event of last week. Not this week, that is, not the brilliance of the astrophysicist who successfully landed that probe on the comet 300 million miles away from the earth, but the scandal of the shirt that he dared to wear in the control room when he was interviewed on television. It was a garish bowling shirt covered in pictures of rather buxom women wearing swimsuits and the like. And of course, it was designed actually by a woman. It was given to him by a woman. But the feminists of the world were outraged. They were deeply offended by the utterly inappropriate. And the inappropriateness of this shirt. Inappropriate is a word that we hear a great deal today, isn't it? It's a new word for wrong or for sinful, for people who just don't like to use the language of morality. But in fact, they're just as moralistic and just as self-righteous as any of their forebears, and just as full of self-conceit. Because we like to think that these days we're not like that at all. So we use words like inappropriate instead of wrong. But why do people so easily take offense? Well, in this article, Campbell Jack says this, if you discard an awareness of human fallenness and our smallness in comparison with our Creator, you end up with a world where ego is everything. People who in effect worship themselves and lose even the appreciation of any greatness in others. And I think that's true. It doesn't really matter whether we live in a religiously conservative culture or in a very liberal secular culture, because the human heart is really just the same.

And egocentricity and self-righteousness can take any political and cultural hue. But at its heart, it is exactly the same. Again, as Campbell Jack says, there will always be a cause for offense, however small, however imagined, because the offended are the center of their own world.

You see, we think we're in the right. Our views are the good news, and others whose talk or behavior in any way challenges that, well, that's offensive to us. It's inappropriate.

It's a challenge to our unassailable sense of our own superiority, of our own cherished morality.

Even if our particular morality is that we're very progressive and liberal, and we don't want to use the language of right and wrong at all, so we talk about things as being inappropriate, because that has a sort of ring of universal reasonableness about it, doesn't it?

But you see, the world hasn't changed, and the human heart hasn't changed, even though the cultural expressions of these basic conceits of the human heart may have changed.

[11:18] And Jesus caused offense because his actions were deemed inappropriate for many. So verse 34, look at him. That's what the Twitterati of the first century were tweeting.

Look at him. He's a glutton and a drunkard. I guess today it would be things like, well, look at him. I mean, he promotes junk food. What could be worse than that?

Or, oh, he's even been seen with an e-cigarette. That's very inappropriate these days. Look at him, they said, the friend of tax collectors and sinners. In those days, the outrage was because he was hanging around with financiers who got rich at other people's expense, and with prostitutes who were very much socially outcast in those days. I guess today it would be an annoyance that he would dare to hang around with people like bankers and the like. Yes, I heard that he had a freebie about that particular man's holiday villa in Tuscany. Isn't that absolutely shocking and disgraceful? Of course, the real disgrace is that somebody else gets the freebie in Tuscan villa, and we don't. That's why we get annoyed about it. Or they would have said about Jesus, perhaps all that missionary travel. I mean, think of his carbon footprint. How disgraceful. Or perhaps, do you know, I even actually heard he went for a meal with a footballer who had got out of prison after a rape sentence. And, you know, I even heard he once went to watch him train. Isn't that absolutely shocking?

inappropriate. Or the ex-cabinet minister, who was jailed for perjury, who now says he's a Christian and Jesus has been hanging around with him. You know, he writes books and he preaches about repentance and a changed life. I mean, come on. What on earth does Jesus think he's doing, having anything to do with a man like that? Can a leopard change his spots? See, that is a real question, isn't it? And that was the real challenge to Jesus' message of grace and forgiveness. Isn't it just indulgence of people's disgraceful and sinful behavior? Isn't his message just like saying, well, it doesn't matter. I'll take you just as you are. And then you just go on being just as you are. Isn't this message of good news for sinners, isn't it inappropriate? Isn't it offensive to all good people?

[13:55] Well, no, a thousand times no. That is Jesus' whole point. His message is not a message of cheap grace like that. His message is a message of challenging and changing grace. We've seen already his message demands real repentance. And the grace of real repentance works real renewal in the human life.

It brings release from the crushing slavery of sin's past. And it brings release into the liberating service of Jesus himself, the Lord of life. So when sin's debt is forgiven, then life can be transformed into one of infinite fulfillment and indeed one of infinite fruitfulness. And real salvation, real salvation never ever means anything less than that. And that's what Jesus says in chapter 7 verse 35 there, that wisdom, that is God's saving gospel wisdom, that it's justified, it's proved true by her children.

The proof of the power of God's saving grace in Christ is in the fruit, in the tangible reality of lives that are changed and transformed and released from the death of sin and released from the past into a new life of fruitfulness as servants of the living God, which is what human beings were created for. And so Jesus goes on, having said that there, to give some very real life examples of the transforming power of his real salvation. And then he gives an explanation in parables to just drive that message home again. And it's all about the real and evident fruit that results when people are released from the debt of their sins and the transforming grace of the good news of the gospel of the kingdom that does that. So first we have vivid pictures that exemplify real salvation, and then we have vivid parables that explain that real salvation. Luke has ordered it so very clearly for us. So first of all, look at verses 36 of chapter 7 to chapter 8, verse 3, where we have examples, where we have vivid pictures of real salvation. These verses exemplify real salvation as a release from sin's debt, and therefore from sin's past. A release from slavery to sin into a new life of loving service to Jesus Christ.

Now the story here that begins in verse 36 is one of the best known in the gospels, although actually it's only Luke who recounts it for us. And it's a both wonderful story and a powerful story. One of the Pharisees invites Jesus to dinner. And notice, by the way, that Jesus doesn't refuse him, even though we're told back in chapter 7, verse 30, that the Pharisees were against him, that they had rejected both John's ministry and Jesus' ministry. But Jesus likes to give even cynics a chance.

[17:11] And so he invites him, and he's willing to go. And this Pharisee, it seems, just wonders, perhaps, if there is something to the story that Jesus is a prophet. He wants to suss him out. That's why he invites him. But before they even got talking, verse 37, there's an intrusion. Behold, look, a

woman of the city has come in. That almost certainly means that she was a well-known prostitute. And that's not really what you would expect, perhaps, at a posh dinner party. But apparently the houses were rather open. It was quite easy to gatecrash, however inappropriate it might be to do so. But not only does she gatecrash the dinner party, she starts to give extravagant and extraordinary attention to Jesus. Now, this is utterly inappropriate. She's letting down her hair. Well, that's something you didn't do in public. That's something you did in the bedroom. And all this anointing of his feet and wiping his feet with her hair and kissing, that's very intimate behavior. You can imagine, can't you, the offensiveness of this to Simon and to the rest of them. And Simon is very clearly offended. Verse 39, he knew very well who this woman was and what she was like. And he thought to himself, well, if Jesus can't tell from her behavior alone what she's like, then some prophet he must be.

Looks like he's enjoying it. He's as disgraceful as she is. This just proves it. He is the friend of sinners, all right. He's a promoter of their sin. That's what this Jesus is.

Well, leaving aside the conceited self-righteousness of Simon, there is a real question there, isn't there? And it's still a real question today. Does Jesus welcome sinners and thereby just condone their sin?

Does he encourage them to go on in their sin? Well, Jesus, verse 40, answers Simon's thoughts. By the way, notice the irony. Simon concludes Jesus can't possibly be a prophet, and yet he has absolutely read Simon's mind completely and answers him.

[19 : 23] And he gives him a lesson about debts and forgiveness and the result of that forgiveness, issuing in real love and issuing a transformed life and transformed loyalties.

Two debtors. Both have the debts canceled, but one has a far, far bigger debt than the other. And the point's very clear, isn't it? And Simon gets it immediately, verse 42.

Which of them will love him more? The one who forgave their debt. Well, obviously, the one who knew he had been forgiven far more, I suppose, says Simon, perhaps realizing he's about to be snookered by Jesus. Yes, says Jesus, you're absolutely right. And that is this woman.

She has been forgiven much, he says in verse 47. The ESV here is a little bit ambiguous. The NIV's right to translate that. Her sins have been forgiven, both there and in verse 48. It's a past perfect tense that Jesus uses. She has been forgiven much, says Jesus. And you can tell because she loves much.

And she's demonstrating it right in front of you right now. Wetting my feet with her tears, wiping with her hair, kissing my feet, anointing with all this precious ointment. Look at the love.

[20 : 45] Now, don't misunderstand. Jesus is not saying that love buys forgiveness from Jesus. The parable says the exact opposite of that, doesn't it? And Jesus is explicit in verse 50. It's her faith in Jesus that has saved her. But her love proved that her forgiveness was real.

And her love proved that the release from her past was utterly real. And nor is Jesus saying, of course, that this woman is a greater sinner than Simon with a bigger debt.

But what he is saying, the clear point, is that she has a much greater sense of her own sin and her hopeless indebtedness. She knows that she's under a crushing weight of sin. She knows that she needs forgiveness. But Simon doesn't seem to know that at all. And if her great love speaks so eloquently of her true peace with God and her acceptance with God, well, the question remains, doesn't it?

What did Simon's actions, or rather his lack of actions, suggest about his state with God? Because he says Jesus gave no water, no kiss, no oil even for his head. You see what Jesus is saying? He's saying it is love to Jesus that is the real test of a heart that has been touched by real salvation that's been liberated by real grace. Because you see, there are two ways of relating to God and his commands. There's the way of cold legalism, and there's the way of warm love.

[22 : 19] And that's the difference between dead religion and living repentance. You see, religion is a substitute for real repentance. Religion contains God. It keeps the whole concept of salvation small enough for us to think that, well, we can deserve it or win it by our performance, by our pedigree.

It sits very easily, doesn't it, with our sense of pride and personal prejudices. We justify ourselves more and more as we're offended more and more by other people, and they're inappropriateness. The religion, you see, demands no real repentance from us, and it grants no real grace to others. But Jesus knows the difference between dead religion and living repentance, between cold legalism

and warm love towards him.

And he can tell whether our hearts are like Simon's heart or like the woman's heart. Someone's put it, it's not all the same to Jesus how people treat him, because he's not a concept or a philosophy. He is the lover of our souls, and therefore he knows with a deep unerring knowledge when our hearts are going out to him in love and when they're not.

He knows that. He knows that about every one of us here this morning. That's quite a thought, isn't it? Real salvation and real forgiveness means release from the debt of sin and therefore release from the past of slavery to sin into a new life of love and of loving service to Jesus Christ, our Savior. A truly cleansed heart is a truly loving heart. And that's what this woman showed.

What she did was costly. That anointment was very expensive. And her action was very brave and costly socially, obviously. And it showed her care, her love, her concern for Christ's person and his needs.

[24 : 19] And it expressed emotion, something that Simon clearly found very difficult and was uncomfortable with. And sometimes we might find it embarrassing or awkward the way some people express their genuine love to Jesus. The way people express their love to Jesus is bound to be bound up, isn't it, with their personality, with their culture, with their background, with their vernacular, a whole lot of different things. And that may be very different to ours, and we must be very careful not to despise, genuine expressions of love and affection to Jesus, even if it might not be our way of sharing love.

That's really important, isn't it? Some people will express their emotion in a way that's much more exuberant than yours. That doesn't mean it's just froth. It doesn't mean it's just insubstantial and not real. It can be very real and genuine. Some people's expression of real emotion and affection for Jesus may be much more restrained than yours. That doesn't mean necessarily that it's lifeless and dead. Again, it can be, but it could be very deep and genuine and heartfelt.

But the Lord Jesus knows the people whose love to him is real and beautiful. And this woman's was, and he said it, and she was changed. She loved him greatly, and she showed that her faith, verse 50, which had saved her, was real by that love. And Jesus says she has peace with God. Go in peace.

What was the angel's message when Jesus was being announced as coming into the world? Peace on earth among those with whom God is well pleased. And that's this woman, says Jesus. God is well pleased with her because her faith has saved her. And this is what real salvation looks like. Real forgiveness means real change from slavery to sin into a new loving service of the Savior. The grace of true salvation will transform your life always and forever. And that's what's underlined in chapter 8, verses 1 to 3, because this woman was not the only one by any manner of means who had been transformed by Jesus.

We're told in verse 1, Jesus goes on proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God, the news of his salvation through all the cities and villages. And look who's with him. Not just the twelve apostles, verse 2, but all these different women from different backgrounds. But every one of them had been healed, had been saved by Jesus Christ. Some of them from evil spirits, some from a host of different infirmities, no doubt of body and of mind. Mary Magdalene, look at her, what a desperate past she must have had. Who can imagine what these seven demons had done to blight her life in the past?

[27 : 19] Or Joanna, the wife of a top royal aide, and yet she too had been saved by Jesus and needed saving by Jesus. You could hardly imagine a starker social contrast than that, could you? Mary Magdalene and the head of Herod's household. And yet Joanna wasn't too posh to work with Mary. And Mary didn't seem to have any sort of inverted snobbery or chip on her shoulder, so she resented being with somebody like Joanna.

Not always like that in the church, is it? Both snobbery and inverted snobbery and chips on the shoulder can so easily blight people's service to the Savior. But if these two can work together, surely any can work together. And then there was Susanna and many others. And notice what they did, verse 3. They provided for Jesus and his ministry out of their own means. That means they gave their time and their talents and their money joyfully out of love for Jesus Christ in order to serve the kingdom of Christ.

You see what Lucas is saying to us. Real love to Jesus includes real emotion, yes, real expression of it, yes. But not only that, it shows itself equally gladly in hard slog, and for that matter in hard cash for the service of Christ's kingdom. And these women demonstrate that in their whole lives, in

their whole priorities, it's the fruit of real love to the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember John the Baptist's message back in chapter 3? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. Remember Jesus himself in chapter 6, verse 44?

Each tree is known by its fruit. And these vivid pictures of real salvation show us that real love to Jesus is the test of whether faith is real, of whether salvation is real. And that real love always issues in real service, in obedience to Jesus, and in obedience to his call and direction upon our lives. Jesus said in the upper room, do you remember, to his disciples, if anyone loves me, he'll keep my word. Whoever does not love me does not keep my word. And by this is my Father glorified, that you should bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples. Abide in my love, he says. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments, and I abide in my love. You see, real salvation is a release from sin's debt, and therefore from sin's past. It's a release from slavery to sin into a whole new life of love, and therefore of service to the Lord Jesus

Christ who saves you. But of course, Jesus isn't naive. He is very clear himself that not all who lay claim to him are in fact genuine. Back in chapter 6, verse 46, he said, why do you call me Lord, and not do what I tell you? This is in Matthew chapter 7. He says, there'll be many who shout, Lord, Lord, but will not enter the kingdom of God, only those who do the will of my Father in heaven.

[30 : 43] In other words, he's saying that belief that doesn't obey, that doesn't bear real fruit, isn't real belief, and doesn't lead to real salvation. And that's why following these examples of true salvation, we have a further very clear explanation of what real salvation means.

And in chapter 8, verses 4 to 21, we turn from vivid pictures of salvation to these vivid parables of real salvation. Verses that explain that the true loving service of real salvation is always visible, always visible, always visible in growing and enduring obedience to the sole lordship of Jesus Christ, the Savior. And Luke records for three parables here, or maybe three parts of one parabolic message, a story of the sower and of the lamp and of his own family. And the whole message is very clearly and closely bound together by a common focus on hearing, and on the fruit of hearing the gospel of the kingdom of God. So there's a huge emphasis on hearing and how you hear. Verse 8, he who has ears to hear, let him hear. And the explanation of the sower in verses 9 to 15 is all about those who hear in different ways. Verse 12 and verse 13 and verse 14 and 15.

And in the lamp story, this message is just the same. Verse 18, take heed how you hear. The very last part in verse 21, that's the word at the very end, hear the word of God and do it.

So what's been exemplified in the preceding stories is now being explained again with great clarity. It's not only that you hear the good news of the kingdom, but it's how you hear.

And how you respond in your life and the whole fruit that that response affects. That's what really matters. And so you see also the emphasis on fruit in verse 8. The seed growing and producing a crop of a hundredfold, a huge and incredible yield of fruit. And in verse 15, not just fruit, notice, but fruit that endures. Bear fruit with patience, with endurance. Fruit that abides, fruit that lasts. Jesus is at pains in these parables here to teach us that there is a kind of believing that doesn't bear lasting fruit. And therefore that isn't actually real faith in him at all. Because faith that is real, faith that endures, always, always produces fruit that endures.

[33 : 28] He explains for us that what he is doing in proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom is sowing real seed. It's like a sower going out to sow. And make no mistake, he explains to the disciples in verse 11 that the seed is the word of God. It's the gospel of the kingdom, which is the very life-giving word of God to bring things to life. But notice the hugely varied response that he describes. Not all the seed will bear fruit for the sower. Now the whole point of sowing seed is to bear fruit. You don't sow seed in your vegetable patch, do you? Just for the sort of gardening therapy and for the enjoyment of sowing the seed. You sow the seed because you want to eat the fruit. This summer, two of your ministers sowed some green beans. And I have to say there was a bit of a competitive edge, especially from the younger of the two. But they had the same seed. They had the same lovely bamboo wigwams. They grow their runner beans up. But come September, only one of your pastors had a bountiful harvest of beans.

I can't possibly reveal which one it was. But if you come to our house for lunch, there'll be nothing but green beans until at least Easter. And if you go and visit Rupert, it'll be baked beans out of a tin. And yes, I do take a rather smug delight in a very rare victory of any kind over our highly talented staff.

But I'm afraid here is the truth. The difference says nothing whatsoever about me and my superior gardening skills because we had the same seed, the same sowing, the same method. But what I had, through absolutely no doing of mine, was wonderfully receptive and fruitful soil.

And that's Jesus' point here, isn't it, very clearly. There is nothing deficient in God's Word, in the seed. In the good soil, with the right reception, it will yield a truly miraculous crop of fruit.

[35 : 46] But in other soil, with different reception, the result is nothing but sad and disappointing, indeed tragic loss. There is no fruit. And Jesus explains in verse 10 that it's this reception, this act of hearing the Word that is decisive and therefore which is divisive of men and women.

That's the secret, the mystery of the kingdom that he explains. The gospel message, whether it's in parables or in plain words, is the words of life which comes to divide men and women.

Because it forces a reception. And that reception will only ever be in one of two ways. Either God's Word will be received with penitent faith, or it will be received with pride and belief. Those are the only two alternatives in the end.

So as Jesus says in verse 18, if you hearken to his words, if you're seeking more, if you're seeking understanding and growth in what he gives you, more will be given, he promises.

But if you harden to his words, even that which you think you have, says Jesus, will in the end be taken away. So take great care then how you hear, he says.

[37 : 09] Not just deflecting God's Word away from you, like bouncing off a well-trodden path so that the devil snatches it away and leaves no hope of faith that leads to salvation. That way is catastrophic, says Jesus. That's pretty obvious. But so also, says Jesus, is a sort of superficial hearing that remains rootless. That is exposed as such, verse 13, in times of testing.

And so also, says Jesus, ultimately is the kind of Christian belief and discipleship which may very well lead to keen church membership for many years, but is slowly subordinated to the cares of life, verse 14, the riches and the pleasures of life. So that what fruit there was, in fact, turns out never to have matured so that it was actually any use to anyone. Now the only kind of hearing, says Jesus, that is of any lasting value, verse 15, is the hearing that holds fast and bears fruit with endurance that lasts.

Well, a pike staff could hardly be plainer, could it, if it poked you right in the eye? According to Jesus, faith that saves, real saving faith, endures, always.

Belief that doesn't obey, belief that doesn't bear the fruit of obedient service, is not real belief, in other words. Real love to Jesus always issues in enduring obedience and growing obedience that bears fruit for the Savior. It's very, very simple and plain, isn't it?

The gospel that carries the seed of eternal life must take root, and it must grow to produce the fruit of eternal life. That's the consistent teaching of the whole New Testament, Ephesians 2, as we began in the service. For by grace you've been saved by faith, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. That's why he saves us. Or Titus 2, verse 14, our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness, from the death of sin and from its past, and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

[39 : 49] That's a future fruitful service in love of the Savior. God plants his seed of life in us in order to bear fruit, not in order to bear nothing. The fruit of righteousness in us that brings glory to his great name. That's his purpose for us. And so Jesus says we are to take heed how we hear, so as to receive and not reject the path of fruitfulness. The message of the lamp is just the same in verses 16 to 18.

Real faith can't be hidden, so that there's nothing to see. The whole point of a lamp is that it gives light. It's utterly perverse, isn't it? It's utterly unnatural to go and hide a light and put it under a bowl or under a bed. Imagine your grandfather keeps tripping over something in his living room. He keeps falling over his coffee table, and you think, well, you're going to injure yourself. You need to be careful. And he says, well, it's very dim in here. I can't really see properly. That's why I keep tripping.

So you go and buy him one of those wonderfully beautiful bright lights to save him from tripping over again. But then the very next week you get a telephone call from the accident and emergency. So you need to come up. Your grandfather's up here. He's fallen and broken his hip. And you go in and you say, well, what happened, Grandpa? Oh, well, I couldn't see the table and I fell over.

But what about that wonderful bright light I gave you? Wasn't it on? Oh, yes, I had it on. Well, why couldn't you see? Well, I put it in a bowl under the bed because it was so nice and I didn't want to damage it. You say, Grandpa, you idiot. The light is for seeing, guy. So the light wasn't on at all, was it? Well, you see, friends, if your life is still so dark, if there's no sign at all of real obedience to Jesus, then it's very likely that the light isn't actually on. Isn't that right?

Not only is it perverse to hide the light like that, Jesus says in verse 17, it's pointless because the truth will come out in the end. It'll be revealed one day to all as real or as false.

[42 : 07] And what a shocking thing that'll prove to be for some when they come face to face with Jesus, that are exposed just as Simon was exposed that day when he came face to face with Jesus. Not to be true, but to be false. Take care then how you hear verse 18, because the gospel even now is God's instrument of division. You receive it penitently with a receptive heart. More will be given so as you go on and produce real fruit that will last. But receive it proudly. Receive it with a resistant heart. And beware, says Jesus, even the light that you think you've had will be taken away from you.

Every time, what he means is every time we hear God's living word, we are either gaining or losing light. And the only way to more light and to lasting fruit is to grasp what you already have and to cherish it and to seek more.

Not to resist the commanding voice of the Lord Jesus. And so Jesus drives the message home in these last couple of verses, 19 to 21, about his true family.

Who could possibly think that they have more than Jesus' own natural kith and kin? But Jesus is crystal clear. Those who have a real and lasting relationship with him now and for all eternity are those who show their filial love for him in loving obedience to his command.

Verse 21, those who hear the word of God and do it. Those who show by their fruit the tree to which they truly belong. And notice here that hearing and doing God's words means hearing and doing Jesus' own words.

[44 : 03] He used an identical phrase here as he did in chapter 6, verse 47, where he talks about doing what I say, what he commands us. And later on in chapter 9, as we'll see again, he says that if we are ashamed of him and his words, he will be ashamed of us on the day when he comes to judge the earth.

And Jesus' words there in Luke chapter 9 are these, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. Take heed how you hear so that you bear fruit that endures.

For Levi, as we saw in chapter 5, that meant leaving his life of greed and gain and becoming a generous giver for God. For this woman here, it meant leaving her sinful past and serving the Savior in a totally changed life.

The gathering demoniac, the next part in chapter 8, we'll see it meant going back to his local community as a witness for everything that God had done to him. And so it must be in its own way for every single one of us who will follow Jesus, who's been released from our debt of sin, who's been released from our slavery to the past into a new life of loving service to the Savior, a life that bears fruit, that endures.

Real faith, working real salvation, is seen in a love that's real, that's expressed, always in obedience to Jesus that endures.

[45 : 42] It's not the hearers of the law, says Paul, who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. Be doers of the word, not hearers only, deceiving yourselves, says James.

And John in Revelation chapter 14 says that the saints who inherit glory are those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus Christ. So friends, as we close today, there is in this teaching, I think, a great comfort for us.

If you doubt yourself, if you wonder whether your past could possibly mean that you could be acceptable to God, or whether you could perhaps really be a real Christian, maybe you can't express it all in the right words, maybe you can't understand it all yet, and you think, well, could I really be a Christian then?

There's great comfort because all I need to do is ask you one simple question. Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you love him? Do you love him greatly for what he's done for you?

Do you want to do for him whatever it is that you can do? If your answer to that question is yes, then Jesus says that's real Christian faith. Go home in peace.

[46 : 58] Your faith has saved you. I know because I can see the love in your heart being poured out to me. Isn't that a great comfort? But alongside it, there is a great challenge too, isn't there?

To take heed how we hear and respond to his words, and how we go on hearing and responding to his words with all of our hearts. Not to be sunk by life's struggles so that we abandon our Savior. Not to be seduced by life's successes so that we choke off his word and stop hearing. Take heed then how you hear, for the one who has, more will be given.

For the one who has not, even that which he thinks he has will be taken away. Real faith issues in real love to Jesus always. And real love is seen in real obedience that endures and bears fruit that endures.

And the truth will out in the end, under the blinding light of the judgment of the Lord Jesus Christ. But Jesus knows already.

[48 : 12] He can see and hear. And into your hearts too. So he calls out to us today, just as he called out to all of those who heard him that day.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear. Amen. Let's pray. Amen. Lord, support us in the strenuous race.

Do not let our footsteps stray. Strengthen our feet with steady pace, still to press forward on their way. Our souls and flesh, with all their might, transfigure with your heavenly light.

And may you indeed be our love, our joy, and our crown forever. Amen.