

‘Amazing disgrace’.

A couple go to a marriage counselor. She said, “it was all about respect”. She said, “he gave her no respect”. He'll come home every day, smelling of work, walks past her in the kitchen, doesn't speak, gets beer out the fridge, won't even change or wash, grabs the TV remote and plonks himself down in front of the TV and that's him for the night. Then comes to bed and doesn't shower until he gets ready for work next day. He decided to save his marriage. Next week he went to work, took a change of clothes with him. After work he showered, put on after-shave, then his fresh clothes.

On the way home he stopped at the florist and bought a huge bouquet of flowers. When he got home he stood at the front door and rang the bell. His wife opened the door, saw him looking good, smelling nice and holding the flowers. She just burst into tears. Bewildered the man asked his wife “what was wrong?” and she said, “This has been the absolute worst day of my life, the cat got stuck up a tree, I had to call out the fire service; I got a call from school to say that your son has been excluded for fighting; your mother called to say she is coming to stay for two weeks; the washing machine broke and the kitchen is flooded and to top it all off, I answer the door and you've come home drunk”

Once we make up our minds, a certain person has lived disgracefully; it's hard to change our opinion about them. One of the amazing things about Jesus, was his ability to see people as they could be, instead of as they used to be. Aren't you glad that God can do that? Aren't you glad, that when God looks at us today He doesn't see all the stuff that we used to do, but he sees what we can be in Christ Jesus.

The problem is, we want God to look at us that way, and we're slow to look at others that way. It's an Amazing disgrace, when we are unwilling to view others as God is willing to view us. Let's go to **Luke chapter 7**, this is a story about a man, in conflict with Christ.

Luke 7:36-50 “One of the Pharisees invited Jesus to eat with him. Jesus went to the Pharisee's house and was eating at the table. A woman who lived a sinful life in that city found out that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house. So she took a bottle of perfume and knelt at his feet. She was crying and washed his feet with her tears. Then she dried his feet with her hair, kissed them over and over again, and poured the perfume on them. The Pharisee who had invited Jesus saw this and thought, "If this man really were a prophet, he would know what sort of woman is touching him. She's a sinner." Jesus spoke up, "Simon, I have something to say to you." Simon replied, "Teacher, you're free to speak." So Jesus said, "Two men owed a moneylender some money. One owed him five hundred silver coins, and the other owed him fifty. When they couldn't pay it back, he was kind enough to cancel their debts. Now, who do you think will love him the most?" Simon answered, "I suppose the one who had the largest debt cancelled." Jesus said to him, "You're right!" Then, turning to the woman, he said to Simon, "You see this woman, don't you? I came into your house. You didn't wash my feet. But she has washed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You didn't give me a kiss. But ever since I came in, she has not stopped kissing my feet. You didn't put any olive oil on my head. But she has poured perfume on my feet. That's why I'm telling you that her many sins have been forgiven. Her great love proves that. But whoever receives little forgiveness loves very little." Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven." The other guests thought, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?" Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

We know that from reading the gospels, Jesus spent a lot of time with the downtrodden and the outcast of society. However, there are other gospel stories where Jesus was with the well heeled or the well to do of society. Just because Jesus was interested in the rejected of society, did not mean he was uninterested in the respected of society. So when a rich, well respected man, like Simon, says, “I'm having a party in my house, will you come?” Jesus said, “yes”.

So Jesus went to Simon's house and dinner was served in the courtyard, where anyone could have walked in to hear the wisdom of the Rabbi and Simon was the host. But the amazing thing is, even though Simon was the host, somebody else gave the hospitality. Into the courtyard walked in a woman off the street. And we're talking not about a homeless person, but a woman who earned her living off the street. But she came to Jesus.

You see, it doesn't matter what we've done in the past. We don't know what our individual reputations are with people right now. But this woman was not prepared to let her past or reputation keep her from approaching Jesus and we shouldn't either.

So she came to Jesus, and it would appear that she was going to anoint his feet with perfume, but as she got closer and closer to him, Her emotions got the better of her and she broke down. She just began to weep. Not just sobbing, but crying her heart out.

She began to cry so hard, she splattered his feet with her tears and she wanted to clean it off, but she couldn't touch anything in a Pharisee's house, because she was an unclean woman. So, she just took her hair and started wiping the tears off of his feet and then she took the perfume and began to pour it over his feet and kissed his feet constantly. She just kept crying.

Often Jesus would stop someone from crying. He doesn't stop this woman. It could be that she is weeping because she is repenting, instead of running towards sin, she now wants to run away from it. And we should be doing the same: running away from sin, not towards it. **Aren't we glad that Jesus is willing to publicly admit that he is a friend of sinners?** He is standing up saying that; **"he is a friend of people who have sinned"**.

Paul says to Timothy, "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life."

Jesus wanted to make public his patience and mercy for sinners, but Simon didn't think that this was a display of patience and mercy. Simon thought it was a spectacle, of shame and compromise. And he thought to himself, **"if this man was really a prophet; if he was really a holy man and not just some con-artist, he would know she is a wicked sinful woman."** Simon's view of righteousness demanded that you keep yourself away from sinners like her. And to Simon the whole scene was an amazing disgrace.

In fact, Simon's conclusion was that Jesus' offer of grace was disgraceful. He thought it was disgraceful that he would be in the company of that kind of woman. He annoyed Jesus, over how grace should be extended and Simon is not alone. Not only does he have a lot of company in the Bible; he has a lot more company today. People are constantly confused over how grace should be extended to others.

Remember in Matthew chapter 20, the story of the vineyard workers? Some worked all day; some only worked a few hours and they were all paid the same amount. But those who worked all day complained that it was unfair: The owner had been too gracious and he says to them in **verse 15. "Can't I do what I want with my own money? Or do you resent my generosity towards others?"** The owner tells them he can do what he wants with his own money, or are you envious because I'm so generous. **Is that the problem?**

Some people today are annoyed because Christ is just too generous with the wrong kind of people. That's exactly how the older brother felt in the parable of the Prodigal Son. He thought it was disgraceful that his dad was giving grace to his sinful brother who had squandered money on women and booze. The older brother was absolutely fizzing with anger and he was bitter about the grace his father had given to his younger brother.

It was exactly the same with Jonah. In the Old Testament, **Jonah disobeyed God's command to go to Ninevah, to get the people to repent.** Because Jonah was afraid that God would forgive those people. **Jonah 4:1-2 "But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the LORD, "O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God; slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.**

Jonah accused God of being irresponsible to people who didn't deserve it. He's telling God that grace is too good for some people and he's telling God that he and his friends are down here to make sure that God doesn't get irresponsible with grace. Just like Jonah, Simon believed that grace was just too good for some people. He thought to himself that, **"Jesus didn't know what kind of a woman she was"**.

Well, guess what? Not only did Jesus know what kind of woman she was, he also knew what kind of man, Simon was. And for every person that disagrees with God about how He dispenses grace, He has one question: **Jonah 4:4 "The Lord asked, "What right do you have to be angry?"**

Do we today, have any right to be angry at God for how God forgives people? That's the question that was being posed to Simon in the parable. Jesus is saying: "Simon two guys were in debt, one owed a fortune; the other, a small amount. Neither can pay, but they both get the debt cancelled, no matter the size of the debt." "And Simon, have you any right, when you got your debt cancelled, to be angry at how the Master wants to forgive someone else's debt?"

Who are we to say that it's disgraceful the way God dispenses grace, when we need it so much ourselves? That's what Jesus was trying to say, when he said: "Simon, do you see this woman?" That's a weird question. How could Simon not see the woman: she was right there! But there was another way Simon saw the woman. Simon saw a Tramp. Simon saw a sinner. Simon saw a woman that wasn't good enough for the love of God. You see Jesus was saying: "Simon, you think you see this woman, but you don't see the woman. And the reason you don't see the woman, is because you still don't clearly see yourself." Remember this loved ones: nothing so blinds a person as a vision of their own sufficiency.

Let's take a look at how Jesus, looks at you and at Simon, and at me. Because in that little parable we have a clear as an example as anywhere in the Bible, of the Gospel according to Jesus. Jesus says four things about the Gospel:

Number 1: According to Jesus, the way Jesus sees it, ALL men are debtors to God. Every single person. Jesus does not go soft on sin. He does not gloss over sin. Jesus admits this woman has committed many sins. That's not the point. The point is, Jesus contends, that every single person is in God's debt, regardless of their degree of sin. Everyone is a debtor to God.

OK, so your list of sins might not be as long as mine and the temporal consequences of your sin might not be as great as Jeffrey Archer's. But the eternal consequences are just as devastating. In fact, answer this question: How many sins does it take to send someone to hell? Just one. So if you're going to hell because of your sins, does it matter if someone else's list is longer or shorter than your list, if you can't pay the debt? Everyone is a debtor before God.

So why should we mind it here if our church became full of sinners? Because we all have debt we could not pay. In fact, if we really knew what lives in the heart of the people we sit next to in church, we would probably get up and move. The problem would be, they've already moved away from you! Everyone is a debtor to God.

Is that how we see ourselves? Or is that how we only look at others? Here's a prayer we should take up; you've probably heard it before: "Dear God, So far today I've done all right. I haven't gossiped; I haven't lost my temper; I haven't been greedy; grumpy; nasty; selfish or over indulgent. I am thankful for that. But in a few minutes God, I'm going to get out of bed and from then on, I'm probably going to need help." Everyone is a debtor to God.

Number 2: No one can pay off their debt to God. Most people, like Simon, think the fact that they are much better than a lot of other people, this will cover their debt to God. Many think that God will measure how they've been and if they've been a lot better than other people, so they don't require so much grace, then they'll be saved.

These people think that grace is like a bank loan. How do you get a bank loan? You prove you don't need one! You just try going into the bank and saying: "I'm penniless; I have no money. Please give me some." Then wait and see what they tell you. You get money from a bank when you can prove you don't need any.

And people think that's how grace works: You live a good life. You prove to God you didn't need any grace and He gives you some. Wrong! That's not how it works. There's going to be a lot of people on the day the debt is due who did more right things than wrong things, but they're going to wind up in the wrong place.

Because on that day a lot of people will be shocked, when they find out that God does not grade according to how many good works they have done. All their currency, whatever it is, it could be their good deeds; it could be their Bible knowledge; it could be taking care of the sick; it could be their faithfulness to their neighbors; it could be the love of their family. Whatever it is, all that currency is worthless in the sight of God.

Some might believe that they are a lot better than some of these people and they're probably right and perhaps my debt to God is not as big as their debt. However the point is this: Jesus said, "neither man had the ability to pay". It doesn't matter what size of debt we have individually accrued before the Lord; we don't have anything to pay it off. Nothing.

The way Jesus sees it, it's not; God helps those who help themselves. God helps those who are helpless and hadn't even asked for help. Paul says: "Because all people have sinned, they have fallen short of God's glory". They receive God's approval freely by an act of his kindness through the price Christ Jesus paid to set us free from sin. It's not a matter of attainment; it's a matter of atonement.

Which leads on to the next point: **Number 3:** Forgiveness is based on the character of God. There was nothing about the character of the debtors, that merited the forgiveness of their debt. It was due solely to the nature of the creditor. In other words, God doesn't cancel our debt because we are so good; He cancels our debt because He is. It is solely this nature that makes forgiveness possible.

Paul says in Ephesians: "All of us once lived among these people, and followed the desires of our corrupt nature. We did what our corrupt desires and thoughts wanted us to do. So, because of our nature, we deserved God's anger just like everyone else. But God is rich in mercy because of his great love for us. We were dead because of our failures, but he made us alive together with Christ. (It is God's grace that saved you.)"

There was nothing in us that made salvation possible. It was all in God. You see salvation is not where God makes up the difference that we can't just quite pay off. Salvation is where God pays the debt, because we didn't have any currency at all. But God, who is rich in mercy, offered grace.

Writing to Titus, Paul says: "Indeed, we, too, were once stupid, disobedient, and misled. We were slaves to many kinds of lusts and pleasures. We were mean and jealous. We were hated, and we hated each other. However, when God our Saviour made his kindness and love for humanity appear, he saved us, but not because of anything we had done to gain his approval. Instead, because of his mercy he saved us through the washing in which the Holy Spirit gives us new birth and renewal. God poured a generous amount of the Spirit on us through Jesus Christ our Saviour. As a result, God by his grace has given us his approval and we have become heirs who have the confidence that we have everlasting life."

Paul is saying: "forgiveness is rooted totally in the nature of God". It's the kind of God he is. Why does that bother us? Why does it bother us that forgiveness is rooted in the grace principle and not the merit principle? It bothers us because it doesn't seem fair to us.

We're saying: "That's not fair God. I have tried hard to keep the commandments. I have tried to be a good steward. I go to church when the doors open; I read my Bible every day. I don't do bad things. I have really tried. So, it doesn't seem fair that you would extend grace to someone who hasn't made the same effort I've made!"

Each and every one of us, were in total abject debt. We had nothing and God forgave it. He's not treating them any different, than He's treating us. It's like a man who had his portrait taken. When he went back to review the proofs, he complained to the photographer, that they didn't do him justice. The photographer told him, he didn't need justice - he needed mercy! We don't need fairness. We need more than fair. What we need is so totally out of proportion, to what we deserve. We need grace.

Number 4: Grace is received by faith in issues in love. That's our part. We receive it. We say thank you God and accept it. The only thing we can do is receive the forgiveness. We can't buy it, not even with love. This woman was not forgiven because she loved; you can't earn forgiveness by loving hard.

In **verse 50** Jesus said: "Your faith has saved you". Somewhere in the past she has heard Jesus teach. She has heard the Good News, that God loves sinners. That God wants people to be with Him. That people matter to God. And she believed it. She came to find Jesus, because when you really believe God and receive His gift, the response is always praise and worship and love. Always. That's what she was doing. She was pouring out on Jesus.

Look at something else here: The things that she used to seduce men with, she used her hair, she used her lips and she used her perfume and now the things she used to sin, she's given to honor God. Remember **verse 47:** "That's why I'm telling you that her many sins have been forgiven. Her great love proves that. But whoever receives little forgiveness loves very little."

She lavished love on Jesus because of what she had received from Jesus. Simon's been counting the wrong things, just like you and I. He'd been counting on how many times he'd been going to church; how much money he'd given to the Temple; how many verses of Bible he knew and all of these things are good and noble, but Paul says in Galatians, "As far as our relationship to Christ Jesus is concerned, it doesn't matter whether we are circumcised or not. But what matters is a faith that expresses itself through love."

The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. Simon didn't love much. Because Simon didn't think he needed much. That woman knew she needed a lot and she received it and her love was overflowing. The irony is, if Simon and that woman walked into any one of many churches today, he would be made an Elder and she wouldn't even be allowed to teach Sunday School.

In the eyes of Jesus, which one was the Amazing disgrace? Our misunderstanding of how God sees us, determines how we see others. How we think God sees us, affects how we see other people. Anyone, who sees themselves as a good person paying off a small debt, will look down on others. On the other hand, those who see themselves as debtors in need of grace to be saved; they will be a friend to sinners.

In 1 John 10+11 it says: "This is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the payment for our sins. Dear friends, if this is the way God loved us, we must also love each other."

And in Ephesians, Paul wrote: "Be kind to each other, sympathetic, forgiving each other as God has forgiven you through Christ."

It is disgraceful for a Christian not to look at others, as we want God to look at us. In Luke chapter 6, Jesus said: "Be merciful as your Father is merciful." When we see an unsaved person, just remember this: There but for the grace of God go I. Any other view is a disgrace.

If you would like God to pay off your debt, why not accept his free offer. Confess your faith in Christ; repent of your sins and be baptised and God will clear your debt. **Why wait?**