

THE JOY OF LIFE: Luke 7:36-50

INTRO: ILLN Buy one get one free

Someone pays for the free gift. Either the customer or the seller

Ep 2:8,9 For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith. It is not the result of your own efforts, 9 but God's gift, so that no one can boast about it.

God offers us the gift of forgiveness and eternal life

Jesus paid the price – his life

Luke 7:41-42 There were two men who owed money to a moneylender," Jesus began. "One owed him five hundred silver coins, and the other owed him fifty. 42 Neither of them could pay him back, so he cancelled the debts of both.

We cannot turn the clock back and wipe out our sins, but God can forgive us and when he does that it is as if we had never sinned

He has paid the debt for us and wiped the slate clean

Last week we had a story about a Pharisee and a Tax collector

This week the story is about a Pharisee and a woman who lived a sinful life

In both stories the Pharisees did not realize their need for forgiveness, while the tax collector and the woman did

Luke 7:36-50

Jesus was invited to have dinner with a Pharisee called Simon

It was customary for outsiders to hover around during banquets so they could watch the ‘important people’ and hear the conversation. Because everything was open they could even enter the banquet hall and speak to a guest. This is why the woman was able to come up to Jesus during the meal.

Even so this was very unusual.

Women were not invited to banquets

Jewish rabbis did not speak to women in public, nor did they eat with them in public

A woman who lived a sinful life would not be welcomed in the house of Simon the Pharisee under any circumstances

Simon is horrified to think that Jesus is allowing the woman near him and even touching him. He concludes that Jesus is not really a prophet

But Jesus knows that the woman is sorry for her sins and wants to change
Her tears and the expensive perfume are evidence of what is going on in her heart

Jesus also knows what Simon is thinking – that the woman is a sinner whereas he himself is a good man

There is no doubt Simon lived a good life – tried his best to keep the commandments

But he did not recognize his sin of pride and self-righteousness

In addition to those hidden sins of the heart he was also guilty of “not doing the good things he should do” – the sins of omission

v.44-46 I came into your home, and you gave me no water for my feet ..., 45 You did not welcome me with a kiss... 46 You provided no olive oil for my head

water, kiss of welcome, oil – common courtesy for guests – Simon treated Jesus with contempt by not offering these things.

The woman on the other hand washed his feet with her tears and dried them with her hair, she kissed his feet and poured perfume on them

These acts did not buy her forgiveness, that had already been given freely, but she wanted to show her love and gratitude in a practical way – it was evidence that she had been forgiven

What happened to Simon after Jesus visit. Did he realize his need for forgiveness and change? We don't know the end of the story because we write the end of the story in our own lives

When we realize our need for forgiveness, accept the free gift that Jesus offers us and respond in a practical way to show our love and gratitude, then we are writing the end of the story

So let's think how things might work out for a modern day Simon – we'll call him Gordon

STORY: THE JOY OF LIFE

Gordon Forbes was a really important person. His office was on the top floor of the building and the view of the harbour was grand. His desk was made of real wood, mahogany in fact, and the company made sure that his computer was always replaced regularly with the very latest model. His revolving office chair was made from real leather. In fact there was nothing in his office that could in any way be called cheap or tatty or nasty. This was only to be expected of course because Gordon Forbes was a very important man. At least that was what people thought. That was the image he portrayed to the general public and to his colleagues in the company. However if they could have looked inside Gordon they would have seen a very different person.

Gordon was not the happy, confident person that most people saw on the outside. Below the surface there was a sense of dissatisfaction with life. This was not something that he felt he could share with anyone else. The reason for his discontent was simple. He had lost the joy of his work. He had reached the top of the tree and was expected to just sit there and manage things below him. Reaching the top had been fun - overcoming challenges, facing seemingly impossible situations and coming out on top, knowing the thrill of winning against the greatest odds. Now however it was all different. His role now was merely as a manager and he did not like it. He did not like it at all, not any of it, not the hiring and firing, the endless resolution of personnel difficulties, the boring meetings, and the feeling that no one really liked him for himself anymore. He had no real friends, just hangers on who were willing to do anything just to get something out of him.

He was a regular at the local church, but even that had become unsettling. He had always tried to live a good life and he was grateful for the good things of life – the way he had been blessed in so many ways – a loving family, a comfortable home. But something inside him had happened just recently - he had been aware that his life tended to revolve around himself and his family. He hadn't really done much for other people and he began to feel that maybe he should have. When he was honest with himself he knew that he had lived a self-centred life and that wasn't the way it should be. Gradually he became aware of his need for forgiveness, and then a sense of freedom when he realized that Jesus had paid the price for all that he had ever done wrong. He felt so thankful and wanted to find a way to give something back in return.

He was contemplating these things as he sat in the kitchen of his lovely restored farm house one Saturday morning. He noticed an ad in the paper- a manager wanted for a conservation group. The British Trust for Conservation Volunteers was looking for a manager for the North East. Gordon loved living in the country and suddenly could see a new challenge opening up for him. Wait a minute though, just look at the salary, only a tenth of the money he was making now. What was he thinking of!

Later that day he was mulling over the advert. He felt that maybe his life was meant to take a different direction. Did God wanted him to do something completely different for the last few years of his working life? Gordon thought about all the good things he had been blessed with, his family, his work, well, most of his working life had been enjoyable, his lovely house in the country, his health, the times when things had gone so well and he knew it was nothing to do with him. God had really been looking after him.

Gordon felt he had received so much out of life and now he wanted to give something back. That evening he sat down by himself and asked God to speak to him about how he could give something back. The ad in the paper came to his mind yet again and he decided he would find out more about the work.

During the next week, from the comfort of his top floor executive office, he made a few enquiries and discovered more about the job. It would require a substantial drop in income, an active outdoor life organising volunteers into weekend and summer work parties for various projects around the northeast. He would have to become familiar with the location of ditches, ponds, footpaths and picnic benches. He would need to wear some suitable overalls and strong boots instead of his nice calf leather shoes. His office suits would be of no use and would be passed on to the charity shop.

The more Gordon thought about it the more excited he got. This was a great opportunity a real challenge again.

The only fly in the ointment was the reaction of his family to his plans. At first his wife Sylvia was worried that they would never be able to afford holidays in the Bahamas again or to replace the Porsche with a new model every couple of years. However, she could see Gordon hadn't been happy for some time and So Gordon applied for the job.

It was November about six weeks later and a white minibus was parked at the side of a muddy pond a few miles up a back road on Deeside. A motley bunch of youngsters were obviously having a great time as they struggled with pondweed, old bits of metal and other rubbish. They laughed and joked with each other as they worked. Standing beside them was Gordon Forbes. He was wearing overalls and rubber boots and he had a big smile on his face. This was one of his squads, this group of youngsters. He had three other teams to look after. He enjoyed visiting them at work in their different locations. He even joined in the work at times. They liked Gordon; they liked to hear his stories of his travels around the world. They liked him especially because he had swapped his well paid job to come and work with them. They felt that they must be special to have someone so clever to want to spend time with them.

Gordon didn't drive a Porsche any more just a medium size family car and he couldn't afford to go to the Bahamas but Sylvia didn't mind. In fact she loved to hear all about Gordon's adventures in his new job. He seemed to be so happy nowadays, always keen to get up in the morning and go to work. Yes it was true that they had given up their comfortable lifestyle, but it was worth it because they had got so much more in return. They had something that money couldn't buy - a joy and enthusiasm for life which was far more valuable than all the luxuries life could offer.