

Luke 7:36-50, Colossians 2:13-15
Debt is Paid
Sunday July 9th, 2017

Today I want to start a serious discussion of the forgiveness of our debt of sin with..... squirrels.



My wife and I are fighting a plague of squirrels. We have a friendly neighbor named Donna who refers to our house and our neighbor's house as the "Squirrel Houses."

They trespass in our garden. They eat our plants.

Twice this summer my wife Deede has bought a series of plants that are supposed to look like this:



and this



Instead they look like this:



and this



The debt these squirrels have built up is enormous, especially for squirrels! The plants we bought cost us about 7 bucks each. They have gone through about a dozen.

I've threatened to eat them—but that is too much work. Besides, I found out these particular squirrels are protected. So... it's the catch and release program for them.

I've caught about 13 of them and each gets a mug shot...



Carl



Earl



Pearl



Bob

But seriously, how can a squirrel pay a debt to us for what it has taken, hurt and destroyed? Can it pay in cactus pods, birdseed? Nothing a squirrel has is of any value to us and when it comes down to it, all that my squirrels have they stole from us!

They have no way to pay their debt, their trespass, their sin!

My friends, we are in the same boat with God—what do we possibly have that we can pay God with to take care of our sin? Our debt?

Now we create debt that we owe God when we trespass in another's garden and take things, hurt and destroy. Just like our squirrels. You are God's child, so when you do things to hurt yourself you create debt, and when you hurt others it creates debt. It's an unpayable debt. God doesn't take cash, yen, rubles, or bit coins?

In April and May of this year the "Sawmill Fire" burned south of Tucson. It was started accidentally by an off duty Border Patrol agent who was target shooting. It burned about 47,000 acres and cost 5.6 million dollars to put out. That border patrol agent is liable for that entire amount. It is, as you can imagine, for a person on a border patrol's salary, an unpayable amount of money. It can only be forgiven most probably by bankruptcy.

Our debt of sin is unpayable for what can we pay God with that God hasn't created and already owns? The debt we owe can only be forgiven, forgiven in a cosmic bankruptcy court where we come before God empty handed.



But no, our debt has been forgiven. It was paid in full on the cross. All we can do and must do is lay our sins at the foot of the cross to be nailed to the cross as our Colossians verse says. And then rejoice in the mercy and grace of God.

Today is a day of great rejoicing for we've finally paid off our debt as a church. We have been released from a 15 year, \$8,400 monthly mortgage obligation. This means today we can and will dedicate this worship center to the praise and glory of God. Now how does this relate to our Gospel Lesson?

In this Bible story today Jesus was invited to the Pharisee Simon's house for dinner. In those days wealthy people like Simon had their homes arranged around outdoor courtyards where such dinners were served. The courtyards were open to the public and when prominent Rabbi's like Jesus came to eat, the public would show up to listen to the

Rabbi speak, and they would sit around the walls of the courtyard. This is how the woman who was a “sinner” got in.



In Jesus’ day, at dinners like this, the guests would actually lay down on the floor with their feet behind them and rest their heads on their left hands as they ate.

This is how the woman could stand behind Jesus weeping and wash his feet with her tears, kiss them and wipe them with her hair. She then anointed his feet with ointment.



Now in Simon’s day if you invited an important person to dinner all the common hospitalities of the day would have been observed. You would have had their feet washed with water. You would have greeted them with a kiss and anointed their head with aromatic oil. None of these things Simon did, which makes you wonder why he invited Jesus in the first place. It certainly wasn’t out of love and respect for none was really shown except the invitation.

Now the point of the parable of the 2 debtors was that this “sinner” woman had already received Jesus’ forgiveness, so out of gratitude she showed her love by doing all the acts of hospitality that Simon didn’t do. Her presence and her actions scandalized, shamed Simon.

So Jesus asks Simon a question that is also addressed directly to us, **“Do you see this woman?”**

Do we only see the sin and the bother and embarrassment, or do we see the sinner, the woman? Do we see this woman as a person to avoid because they might contaminate us, or do we see her as a person, in great need, who gives us an opportunity to minister?

And beyond this woman in our story do we see only the sin or do we see broken, hurting people who need to be freed of the debt of their sin? Do we avert our eyes? Or do we see them like Jesus does, children of God with the all potential they can be?

Do we only see the sin as Simon did, or do we see the sinner in need as Jesus did? Do we see the person as God sees them in the future, and accept them just as they are, to give them life?

In every story in the Bible there are those we identify with. In this story we are given 2 choices: Simon the Pharisee, or the woman. For some it is the woman who is **“the sinner”**. Note: she is not called a “harlot” or “adulterer”, but simply a “sinner.”

That allows all of us who know we are “sinners” to identify with her. The truth is I found in my research that there were 8 or 9 other professions she could have been in, besides the “oldest”, to earn her the designation here as “a sinner.”

Well the Pharisee saw himself as the part of the righteous and the holy, and don't most of us? Nothing the matter with me. And for us, *“unless we see something of ourselves in the character of Simon the Pharisee, we are so blind to our own need (of Jesus and forgiveness) that we have failed to hear the story.”* *“Simon thought of himself as pious and righteous. **He had no idea what it meant to be forgiven and no awareness of his need for forgiveness.**”* New International Bible Commentary on Luke.

And sadly many see themselves in the same way. They don't see themselves as sinners in need of a Savior owing an unpayable debt.

The woman truly had the advantage. She knew she needed help. She knew she had been forgiven an unpayable debt. So out of deep gratitude and love she ministered to Jesus.

If at this point you don't see yourself at all in Simon, you have a problem, for all of us as Christians at times see ourselves as more righteous and holy than others and that leaves us in the state of sin of being “self-righteous” rather than relying on the righteousness of Christ.

It says, “Simon thought 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.” In Jesus’ response to Simon, Jesus showed that he saw who Simon was as well as the woman.

“Jesus went to Simon’s house for dinner. Jesus modeled the same acceptance of him as he offered to the woman. Jesus did not stand removed from this self-righteous, arrogant, backward Pharisee. He also offered him acceptance and Grace.” Desperate Preachers Site ‘CalgaryClergy’ June 8, 2010

Both were sinners. Simon did not see his sin, and so, he was blind to his need for a savior in Jesus; so Simon missed God’s grace and new life. He loved little and it showed. His debt remained!

The woman on the other hand, “Her openness to God’s forgiveness and her selfless loving response are accepted as faith, (by Jesus) and forgiveness is equated with salvation.” “The result is peace,” Shalom: **“Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”** New International Bible Commentary on Luke.

All in this story are sinners but Jesus. He is the source of forgiveness and Grace. Do you see yourself in Simon or the woman? Both are sinners, and here today in this time and place, God accepts you—just as you are.

If you are a Simon sitting in judgment and condemnation of others and do not see them as children of God with all the potential that God sees in them, here in this time and place is your opportunity for receiving repentance, forgiveness and new life. You can receive new eyes to see beyond the sin, to the sinner, to the person, to the woman, and in Christ see what they can be.

You will know if you are a Simon if your love has grown cold and you feel no desire to shower acts of love on Christ by loving others and his body the Church. But if your love has grown cold, in this house of God, Jesus will revive and warm you with the fire of the Holy Spirit if you ask.

If you see yourself in the woman and are painfully aware and ashamed of your sin and the enormous debt you have piled up with God; here in this time and in this house of God you can receive peace, forgiveness, and new life.

In 2001 and 2002 \$750,000 was initially given and pledged for the building of this Worship Center. \$900,000 was borrowed. The fundraisers that were consulted at that time said it was impossible for a church of the size of Vista at that time to take on such a large project and the debt that went with it. **The total spent on this worship center was \$1,585,393.**

But over the years through 100s of people's deep sacrifice we have been able to pay off this debt. Before I arrived here at Vista Church 2 pieces of property were given to the church. They were sold for 90k, which was applied to the principle of the loan. Many bricks were sold and special sacrificial gifts to bring us to this time and place. We are finally free and clear of physical debt, a debt that at one time all the experts said we couldn't pay.

And is not that the truth of our sins, our debts, our trespasses? Some "experts" say no payment is needed and no debt owed like Simon in our story. Others "experts" say we owe more sin and debt to God than can ever be paid so just give up.

Well my friends, the message of Jesus and the Church is, **"We are free of our debt of Sin because Jesus paid that debt on the cross."**

This worship center will stand as a testament to that truth for decades and decades to come. We are all sinners in need of Savior, a Redeemer. We all need to take advantage of the Cosmic Bankruptcy deal that Christ offers today, and we can receive it today by faith through Holy Communion.

So bring your debt of sin to meet Christ's blood on the Cross. Bring it all. Bring your self-righteousness that refuses to see others humanity and deep need.

Bring your sins and sinful lifestyle, bring your debts and lay them down in front of this table, this altar; and then walk away to live a new life, a life like Jesus' for your debt is paid in full!



In Jesus' name amen.