

When You're Weary with Sin

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I'm glad to be back after a week away and especially glad to be able to rejoin together as we celebrate communion today. It's always a special time in the life of our church to celebrate communion together and when we think about how great God is, how great thou art, nowhere is his greatness on greater display than at the cross of Jesus Christ and that's what we remember today with this church ordinance that Christ has appointed for us. He said, "Do this in remembrance of me," and so we're very glad to share in the blessing of communion together today.

We've been teaching through the book of Ephesians. We'll come back to that next week. For today, I wanted to pause and do something a little bit different and simply meditate on how Christ has dealt with you and me in our salvation; how he has dealt so generously with us in our sin so that we could receive communion in a grateful way. Not only should we approach communion having no unconfessed sin in our lives, we come repentantly, we come not clinging to any sin consciously that we're aware of as we take communion as believers together. We should also come with a profound sense of gratitude, of great thankfulness for the immense grace that Christ has shown to us and as we come as believers, as we have walked through life and in this past week and over the past few months, I know that you are like me and that your own sin has a way of wearing you out. You get weary of the struggle with temptation. You get weary of realizing that you have fallen short yet again. Perhaps the words that you hate have come out of your mouth; perhaps you have succumbed to temptation once again and you feel the weight of that. You have blown your top with your family and spoken things and said things that you shouldn't have or maybe you're just seeing the accumulated weight of bad habits, of sinful ways that are simply taking their toll on life and our struggle, our temptation in those times is that sometimes we start to view life through the prism of our own failures and we start to think about Christ through the prism of how we have failed rather than seeing it through the prism of how he has dealt with us at the cross, rather than seeing the abundant grace that he has poured out on us. Friends, we should never let our own unworthiness cloud the view of the grace that Christ has manifested to us in our salvation.

So as we come to communion today, we come to an opportunity to refresh our joy. To come perhaps weary with sin but through the teaching of God's word and through this remembrance that the Lord has appointed, to be able to walk out refreshed because we understand what Christ has done for us and we're going to do something a little unusual here today, at least for our pulpit. What I want to do today is we're going to look at 3

sinner from the Gospel of Luke whom Jesus forgave and use those 3 sinners as pictures of how completely he has reconciled us to God through his life, through his death and through his resurrection, and along the way, we're going to answer 3 questions about your sins in relationship to Christ to give you confidence about the forgiveness that you have in Christ. I know that some of you perhaps more than I realize, struggle with the issue of assurance and you're not sure whether you belong to Christ and you don't walk through with a confidence day by day that, "I belong to Christ and all of those things have been settled." Well, all of those perspectives are answered by the Scriptures that we're going to look at today and so we're going to answer 3 questions about your sins here today as a believer to give you confidence that you can approach God through the Lord Jesus Christ with bold and confident access, confident that you are reconciled to God and that all of your sins have truly been forgiven at the cross of Christ and then we will receive communion with grateful hearts, having had our minds refreshed in this way.

Here's the first question I'd like to answer about your sins here today, if you are here as a Christian and you come and you are conscious of the struggles of the past week and we think about what Christ has done, you might ask yourself this question: are there too many? In other words, have I committed so many sins that Christ is finally going to refuse me and not receive me any longer? Perhaps you're here and you know that you're not a Christian, I know that there are some like that in a room of this size, and as you're contemplating the cross, you think, "No, I've committed too many sins and I've sinned my way out of grace." Well, what would the Scriptures say about that? As we read the Gospels, as we read what our Lord did as he interacted with sinners, we find that the Bible delights in telling us about unworthy men, unworthy women, just like you, who found complete forgiveness from God through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's start with one picture of this kind of forgiveness in Luke 7. We're going to look at 3 examples from the Gospel of Luke here today. Luke concludes his Gospel in chapter 24 saying that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in the name of Christ. That's Luke's version of the Great Commission. Well, before he got to that capstone, he gave us several illustrations of individual sinners who found forgiveness from Christ even despite their unworthiness. So as we answer the question: are there too many sins in your life so that Christ would not receive you, the answer is no. That's not the case.

Look at Luke 7:36. "Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him, and Jesus entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. And there was a woman in the city who was a sinner," probably a prostitute, "and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume. Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner.'" From the Pharisees' perspective, you would not let a sinful woman touch you because it would contaminate you. Her uncleanness would convey ceremonial uncleanness upon you and he said, "If Jesus were a prophet, he would understand this." He would know who this woman was, and the fact that he is letting this woman deal with him in this way to the Pharisee was a sign that Jesus was not who he claimed to be. Well, the Pharisee was looking down on this woman because of her past, what was known and he said, "Look at this sinful one women. Look at what she's done in the past. If Jesus were a prophet, if he were the Son of God, this woman would not be able to approach him."

Well, what did Jesus say about that? What should we say about this Pharisee? This Pharisee was missing the whole point of repentance. He was missing the entire nature of God's salvation being on display right in front of him. Though he was a religious man, he completely misunderstood and had no clue as to what genuine salvation was like. Jesus did not miss it. Jesus, instead, displayed to him his own ignorance and in the process confirmed this woman in her faith.

Look at verse 40, "Jesus answered the Pharisee," knew what he was thinking and said, "'Simon, I have something to say to you.' And he replied, 'Say it, Teacher.'" And Jesus told him a parable, gave him an illustration for him to think about. He said, "A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii," which was approximately a day's wages, "and the other fifty." There are 2 debtors here, Simon. There is one who owes over a year's worth of wages, almost 2 years worth of wages to a moneylender and another who owes 50, almost 2 months worth. "When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more? Simon answered and said, 'I suppose the one whom he forgave more.' And He said to him, 'You have judged correctly.'" It's an obvious point, isn't it, those with a lot of sin who come to Christ and find forgiveness have a great love for Christ in response because they realize the great debt that has been forgiven to them.

So as we consider the question is it possible to commit too many sins so that suddenly Christ won't receive you, no. If you're here and you're not a Christian and you are conscious of all of the sins that weigh down on your conscience, realize that Christ calls even you and says, "Yes, I will receive you. I will forgive you." Christ invites you to come. He says, "The one who comes to me, I will never cast out." Perhaps you're here today as a Christian and you've wandered away, you've strayed from God's word. You have been mediocre and lifeless in prayer and you come and you're just mindful of that and it just seems like you are a thousand miles away from God today as you come. Well, realize that all the more you come and you realize that this cross which we celebrate at communion, this cross was for sinners just like you. Christ would not have you away. Christ would not have you stay sunk in your sins. He would have you come and rise and realize that the cross was for you and complete, full and free forgiveness for your sins is found at the cross and that you would use the occasion of the recognition of your sin to be that which draws you in love to Christ just like it was for this woman who was weeping and cleaning Jesus' feet with her tears and with her hair.

Look at how Jesus applies the parable in verse 44, "Turning toward 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 she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume.'" Now, let's stop right there for just a moment. What Jesus is describing was a gross violation of hospitality in that day. The streets were dirty, often muddy, and so it was a common courtesy for a host to provide for the washing of his guests' feet; to greet them with affection with a kiss on the cheek; to anoint their head and to give them a drop of oil to sweeten their aroma as they shared time together. Simon did none of that and by his refusal of the common hospitality of the day, manifested the hostility in his heart. Showed that he did not love Christ; that he did not give him even the honor due to a common houseguest. He had insulted Christ richly by his failures of the attention of the cultural customs of the day. But what about this woman? Jesus says, "You didn't give me water for my feet, she washed them with her tears. You didn't give me a kiss on my cheek, she hasn't stopped kissing my feet since she came. You didn't anoint my head with oil, she anointed my feet with the expensive perfume that she had. She extravagantly anointed me in a way that you showed not even the slightest inclination toward me."

What do we say about this? Look at verse 47, "'For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.'" Verse 48, "Then He said to her, 'Your sins have been forgiven.'" Jesus was not saying it's because she has loved me that I forgive her sins, her sins were a manifestation of her true repentance. Her repentance and her faith in Christ as shown by the love that she demonstrated toward him, were a manifestation of the reality of her inner faith. They were an outward expression of an inner faith and an inner love and Christ says, "I see that love, I see that repentance and her many, many since as the town prostitute, I have freely forgiven by my authority as the Son of God."

Notice what he says in the context of the way that we're setting this up here today. Notice the offhanded way that he says in verse 47, "her sins, which are many, have been forgiven." He acknowledges the sin. It's not that he ignores it or says that it's not an issue. He acknowledges it but he says, "She has come to me in repentance. She has come to me in faith. She has come to me in love. I gladly forgive her of everything that she has ever done." Do you realize as a Christian that that's exactly the way that God has dealt with you? Let's be clear about something here, you and me: your sins, whether you realize it or not, your sins are many; your failure to love God with all of your heart, soul, strength and mind; your failure to love him and to be earnest and to be sincere; your willingness to accept a mediocre spiritual life is sinful. It's wrong. It's an affront against God. But Christian, what we see, what we're mindful of today is not the guilt of our sins but the grace that says, "Yes, I am aware of all of that sin and when you come to me in repentant faith, I forgive it all. I let it go. I will not take it into account in my dealings with you." All of those sins in your life, Christian, through faith in Christ, are no longer a barrier to you approaching God freely and in love with the assurance of his forgiveness of all that you've done. The grace of Christ is greater still.

Look at verse 49 here in Luke 7, "Those who were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves, 'Who is this man who even forgives sins?'" They knew that only God had the prerogative to forgive sins and here is Jesus in their midst saying, "I forgive you of all of your sins." It was an assertion of a divine prerogative speaking to the fact that he is God incarnate and he has the authority to do exactly what he had just said he had done. He said, "Woman, go in peace. Your sins are forgiven." Verse 50, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." Christian, today as we come to the table, as your faith in Christ is renewed and restored and we bring this back to remembrance in the same way as we come to the table as believers here today, Christ speaks to us and says, "Your sins are forgiven." Christ comes to us and says, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace." So as we come today to the table as Christians to partake of the elements, we do so with a conscious knowledge based on the Scripture, not on our feelings, that God has forgiven all of our sins in Christ. Our many, many sins have been wiped away.

Now, perhaps sin has caught you in a web of lies and shame and there is no way out. You have broken trust with those who are closest to you. Yes, your sins are many but if you have looked to Christ with repentance and faith, here's the key for today: your many, many sins, they are not too many in the sense that they now exclude you from Christ; that he now will reject you; that he won't receive you. You see, that's not who Christ is. He is a gracious, merciful Savior who gladly receives those even with many sins and says, "The arms of forgiveness are opened wide to you. I came into this world in order to save sinners just like you." So we take him at his word today when he says, "Your many sins are forgiven," we come and we accept him at his word and we receive communion with a sense of gratitude and assurance that that is true. Jesus Christ forgives sin. The Apostle John said in 1 John 1:7, "The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." There is no sin that you have committed that excludes you from this table if you're a Christian today. And if you're not a Christian, I've got good news for you: there is no sin that you have committed that keeps you from coming to Christ right now for free, complete, immediate forgiveness. Christ invites you to come and he will forgive all of your sins through faith in him. That's how great a Savior we have. It's wonderful, isn't it?

So, beloved, I say to you based on the authority of Scripture: rest in Christ as we come to the table today. Jesus gives us this remembrance so that we would remember that his blood was intended for a full and complete cleansing of your sin. That there would be no stain on your account with God. That there would be nothing that would hinder your full and free access to him. Why? Not because there is a little bit of redeemable good in you. No, it's because there is a perfect good in Christ and his sacrifice for sin was perfect. It was complete. It was once for all, never to be repeated again. So 2,000 years before you were born, Christ paid the price for your redemption in a way that you can now come and rest in. Praise be to his name.

Now, there is another question we should ask about your sins. Just trying to deal with the questions that come up in confused and broken hearts and those that Satan has confused with false teaching over the years. Are your sins too many? No, no, they're not too many. The prostitute whose sins were many was freely received, freely forgiven. Well, what about this question, point 2: are they too bad? Are your sins so severe, so horrible, that Christ would not receive you? Perhaps there is that one dark sin in your past. Perhaps in order to cover up one sin you committed other sins. You lied to cover up others sins. Perhaps

you aborted your baby in order to cover up other immorality and you know that and you know that God knows it and you feel the weight of that and you feel the pressure of that. What can we say to you? Jesus forgives many sins, but does he forgive the worst of sins or is there a classification and you get into that one class and it's a mortal sin and there is no forgiveness for that? Well, that's not true. No, no, to suggest that is to diminish the cross. To say that the cross didn't cover all of the sins that could be committed, it denies the completeness of Christ's work on our behalf to say that they were some sins that even if we can still get to heaven that we're consigned to an outer room where we have to sit in a corner and reserve the sweetness of close fellowship to God with those who haven't done the bad things that you have done.

Are your sins too bad so that you can't come to Christ? No, they're not. Now, let me clarify as I say that because there is an important point to understand here. Your sins, every one of them, are infinitely evil. Your sins are very, very bad because in every sin is treason and rebellion against an eternal and holy God and when Scripture testifies about us, that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, that there are none who seek God, that there are none righteous no, not one, well, realize that that is serious and that it is bad. The question isn't whether they are bad, though, the question is a little more precise. The question is whether your sins are so bad that Christ will refuse to receive you if you come to him in humble, repentant faith. The answer to that question is no. Praise be to God your sins are not so bad that Christ says, "No, not a sinner like you." He doesn't deal with us that way. He doesn't deal with humanity that way. Beloved, on the authority of God's word, I can say to you with complete assurance, it is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance that Christ Jesus receives and forgives sinners just like you. No exceptions. Jesus showed that sinners can find forgiveness through faith in him.

Let's look at a parable that Jesus taught in Luke 18 to drive that point home. Luke 18, beginning in verse 9. Remember that the Gospel of Luke is teaching us the exact truth about what Jesus did and taught and that Jesus said at the end of the Gospel of Luke that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in my name going forward. Well, what you have in Luke leading up to that climactic statement in part is a series of stories, some actual historical events, other parables, all designed to illustrate and reinforce that truth so that you would have the sense that if you would only come to Christ in repentance, that he will receive you and forgive you and not hold your sins against you any longer. That's the whole point that Luke is trying to convey. What does that repentance look like? What kinds of sinners will Jesus forgive and receive?

Luke 18:9, "He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt." Jesus said, "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'" Boasting in his righteousness. Boasting in his works and doing a particularly wicked thing in comparing his righteousness to that of others and congratulating himself and commended himself to God based on a comparative human righteousness that he thought that he had. And you can see how he separates himself and classes himself: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. He viewed them with contempt, thinking that God was receiving him, boasting in himself, as that which would commend him to God and thanking God for what a great person he himself was. He spoke in this parable, Jesus sets it up and this Pharisee is contrasting himself with the tax collector.

Now, you've got to understand and remember that tax collectors in that society were absolutely hated. They were reviled. They were cheats. They profited on their arrangement with Rome to collect taxes and Rome said, "You need to collect this much in taxes," and then they had the freedom and authority to go beyond that to whatever they wanted to do in order to plunder the people in order to enrich themselves and the people hated tax collectors. They would just spit at the thought of a tax collector. Tax collectors were thugs. They were thieves. They were a degraded class in society and not only degraded and detested, but they were enriched at our expense, was the view. So if ever there was a class of people that religiously oriented people would say they were outside the grace of God, they would not be forgiven, it would be a tax collector.

What was Jesus' point here? What did Jesus teach about even a hated tax collector? Verse 13, "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating

his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'" Notice he says, "the sinner." He sees himself as the worst. He identifies himself and he's not comparing himself to anyone else. He acknowledges his guilt. He owns his sin in the presence of God and with such humility that he doesn't even want to look up to heaven. He just looks down and humbly says, "God, be merciful to me, one who is unworthy of your kindness." In contrast with the Pharisee, he was not righteous in himself. He did not compare himself to others. His hope of being received by God was in divine mercy alone.

Look at it again, verse 13, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner! God, you're a God of mercy. God, I'm a sinner in need of mercy. I appeal to your mercy alone. I realize, God, I realize that there is nothing in me that would commend myself to you. There is nothing righteous about me that would cause you based on my own merits to receive me with favor. I know that, Lord. There is nothing in me. There is no good in me whatsoever. None, God, but there is mercy in you and I appeal to you. I appeal to your mercy as the grounds on which you would receive me."

What did Jesus say about that kind of repentance? Look at verse 14. This just turns traditional thinking about religion and righteousness and acceptance with God utterly on its head. Verse 14, Jesus said, "I tell you, this man," what man? The tax collector; the humble, repentant outcast. That repentant outcast, "went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted." Jesus says, "He went away justified." In other words God considered that tax collector righteous because he turned to him in faith and it was based on that repentant faith, it was through that repentant faith, that God received him, not because that tax collector had any good works of any kind to offer to him.

What can we say about this as it pertains to you here this morning? Your sins are bad. They are. Let's not pretend otherwise. You see, the Bible, the Gospel – oh, this is so very important for you to understand – the Gospel approach to dealing with your sin is not to mitigate it or to minimize it or to say it's really not so bad, it's not so severe. That is not the scriptural testimony at all. It's not that okay, God gives you a little wink and he says, "Come here," and takes you and says, "I guess it really wasn't so bad after all." That's not it and if you want to be saved here today, you have to own your guilt without condition. You have to humble yourself before God and say, "There is no reason for you to accept me. I have sinned against you. I have sinned in your sight. I am not worthy to be in your presence, but would you have mercy on me through the Lord Jesus Christ? Would you receive me as I look to the cross as my sole basis for acceptance?" You see, that is the grounds of acceptance with God, is the one that appeals to him alone, for mercy alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, based on the cross alone and say, "I need to be saved. I need mercy. I come not as one asking for that which is due to me, not as a worker coming for wages that he has earned, I come for a gift that I don't deserve, but I come based on your promise and your offer of mercy in Christ. I come on that basis alone, O God, and ask you to receive me."

Christian, do you realize that the first basis on which you came to God in the Gospel is the basis on which you come to him today as well? That you still come to him not because you have earned anything, because you have grown some spiritually since your conversion? That's not in. Our approach, our appeal, our answer to our debt of sin is always in Christ alone as represented in these communion elements that we will be taking. So, beloved, don't try to mitigate your sin. Own the fact that your sin is bad. Own the fact that there is evil in you, the one that wishes to do good as the Apostle Paul said in Romans 7 and say, "Despite that, I look past that and I look to the cross alone. God, have mercy on me, your erring child, and receive me."

And when we approach God in that way, notice what Jesus said, look back at Luke 18:14. Look at what Jesus says and notice that it is an absolute statement. "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled," in other words, will not be received, "but he who humbles himself will be exalted." If you humble yourself at the foot of the cross of Christ, you can know that Christ will receive you and own you and even today, in light of your bad week, Christ says, "Come to my table. Confess your sins and I will gladly restore you." What a merciful Savior.

The Apostle Paul said in 1 Timothy 1...this is God's word. You know, we just take God at his word on these things and we don't trust in our feelings about whether we feel worthy or not or whether we feel like it or

not. We set all of that stuff aside. We realize that the motions of our heart are unreliable, but God's word can be trusted. We can take him at his word and it brings clarity to our thought and our hearts and our minds. What did Paul say? "It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. Yet for this reason I found mercy," Paul says, "so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life." So what Paul is saying there is, "I am the foremost of sinners. I persecuted the church of God and yet God had mercy on me in Christ. Christ came to save sinners like me. I am the chief and if he saved the chief," here's what we're supposed to draw from this, "if he saved the chief, he'll save all the indians like you and me." He'll save the lesser sinners like you and me. If he went all the way to save Paul, he'll save you too. If he showed mercy and forgave Paul, saved and had mercy on the tax collector, beloved, he'll have mercy on you too. Come to him humbly, forsaking, confessing your sins that have clung to you and say, "Lord, have mercy on me again." Rest in Christ, beloved, as you come to the table today knowing that he came for sinners just like you. Just like you and just like me.

There is a final question that should be asked and answered. We said are your sins too many? No, they're not. Jesus said, "Her sins are many, I forgive her." Are your sins too bad? Look at the tax collector and Jesus said, "Everyone, he who humbles himself, I will exalt. The one who comes to me I will never cast out." Do you get the sense, beloved, you know, do you get the sense as Christ makes himself known through his word today, do you get the sense of the grandeur of the greatness of his grace? The grandeur of the greatness of his grace that he would receive sinners who come to him? He would receive a sinner just like you and not scold you, not castigate you, not banish you to the corner? But to offer himself as the free and full, complete access to God. Total forgiveness. A complete and perfect righteousness credited to your account through faith in him so that you could know that you are fully reconciled to the God of the universe and he gladly owns you as his child and Christ gladly names you as a brother in Christ. He is great. That kind of grace is great. It should be magnified. It should be lauded. It should be trusted. It should be submitted to.

So your sins are not too many to keep you from coming to Christ. They are not too bad to keep you from coming to Christ. There is a final question that I think should be asked and answered: is it too late? Is it too late for you to come to Christ? Perhaps you're like I used to be, perhaps you rejected Christ many times. Perhaps you have mocked him with blasphemy and your central spiritual question is, "Have I committed the unpardonable sin?" You have hated the people of God. You have despised being in a room like this where his word was preached and there is just this pattern of rejection and resentment and opposition and hostility to the Lord Jesus Christ and you ask yourself the question, "Is it too late for me?" Perhaps you're near the end of life and there is not much time left for you. Can someone like you still come? Well, the answer to that question is yes, you can still come. Or to state it and answer the question that I actually asked, is it too late? No! No! No! It's not too late for you to come to Christ because Christ receives even those men who have very little time to live and have absolutely nothing to offer to him in return.

Remember, beloved, the thief on the cross. Look at Luke 23. If ever there was a man whom Christ should have rejected, arguably it was the thief on the cross if salvation had anything to do with human merits or human righteousness or doing something for Christ in order to earn it. We won't look at the parallel passage but in other Gospels it says that there were 2 thieves crucified with Christ, as you know, one on either side, Christ in the center, and early on in that day of the crucifixion, they were both mocking Christ. They were insulting him and rejecting him, but one of those thieves had a turn of heart worked in him by the Spirit of God. Look at Luke 23:39 and following. Actually, look at verse 38. There was an inscription above Christ saying, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS." So he had a written, verbal testimony, the thief did, of who Christ was right there in front of him and in verse 39 as the scene has progressed, "One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, 'Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!' But the other answered," remember, this is a guy that is attached to a cross; he is fixed to a stake; he soon will die; there is no turning back from death to him. He had nothing to offer to Christ, all he had were parched lips speaking what we're about to see here. Verse 40, "The other answered and rebuking him," rebuking the other criminal, "said, 'Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.' And he was saying, 'Jesus, remember me when You come in Your

kingdom!" Incredible. He asked for mercy. A short time earlier, he had been joining in the abuse, but something about seeing the gracious nature of Christ even on a cross, something about, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS" before him, something about the work of the Spirit in his heart, and he does a turn. He changes his perspective on Christ and he looks and he asks for mercy, just like the woman did, just like the tax collector in the temple did. Different words, same spirit of heart, "Have mercy on me, Lord. Remember me."

What does Jesus say? "You had your chance, Bub. It's time for me to go and I don't have room, I don't have time for you. Don't you remember what you said just a few hours ago? Don't you remember what you said and you have the gall to speak to me and to ask me to remember you when I come into my kingdom." Is that what Christ did? That's a horrible thought, isn't it? Can you imagine the broken-hearted thief on the cross getting a response like that? Well, even in his own hour of extremity, how did Christ respond? Verse 43, "He said to him, 'Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.'" It's sometimes hard to press ourselves back into the historical occurrence to know what certain things must have been like, but here the thief is, in his own excruciating physical agony, crying out for mercy, nothing to offer Christ and he gets this word that today in just a little bit longer, you're going to be with me in paradise. Can you imagine the flood of joy over his soul? Can you imagine this is temporary, the suffering is temporary, "I'm going to be with him in paradise and I don't even deserve it!" He just said that. He said, "We're getting what we deserve. We're condemned justly." And what did he do? He appealed to Christ for mercy and Christ said, "Yes, I'm glad to grant you mercy. I'm glad to forgive you. In fact, I promise you that before this day is over, we'll be together in paradise."

Even in impending death, even conscious of his unworthiness, it was not too late for that thief. Do you know what that means? It's not too late for you either. If you're not a Christian, you can come today knowing that Christ is as willing to receive you today as he was the thief 2,000 years ago, as he was the Apostle Paul, as he was that sinful prostitute who wept over his feet. Do you know why we know that? It's because it's who Christ is. It's because he is gracious. It's because he is merciful. It's because he came to seek and to save the lost just like you. That if you're feeling the weight of your sin today in this hour, in this moment, you can know that Christ will receive you if you come to him. Praise be to his name.

Now, notice something about all 3 of these people, the prostitute, the tax collector, the thief on the cross, notice something about them, every one of them: they didn't try to excuse their sin or mitigate it, they simply gave themselves to Christ in humble, repentant faith and on that simple basis, Christ received them, forgave them, cleansed them, justified them, sanctified them, glorified them. Is that you today? Have you turned from sin like that? Do you come to the table today saying, "Lord, I'm mindful of how bad I have been but, Lord, I forsake it all and I just come and ask you to receive me afresh again." Do you know what? This table is for you. This is designed to remind you of the great graciousness of Christ, the grandeur of his grace, in a way that would refresh you and settle your conscience and give you peace and make you love him all the more. That's why we do this. If you're not a Christian, you can receive him now. Now. Why would you wait? It's not too late. It's also not too early. Come to Christ.

But, Christian, let's sum it up: Christ's blood paid the price of justice for you. He paid the penalty that your sin deserved with his blood. His righteousness, his perfect life of obedience to the Father is now credited to your account so that no one, not even Satan himself, can accuse you before the throne of God. Christ's righteousness, Christ's blood is the answer to it all on your behalf. Christian, one day, maybe soon, you will be with Christ in paradise. So as we come to the table, you're mindful of your sins of the past week, listen, you don't have to sit in the corner. You don't have to do acts of penance or count silly beads on a necklace as if repetition like that would somehow impress Christ with your sincerity. Not true. None of it. No, you can rest in Christ. You can rejoice in Christ because he paid it all. That's worth remembering, isn't it? That's worth rejoicing in, isn't it? Christ invites you to come to his table.

Let's bow together in prayer.

Our Father, we thank you that we can see in people like us, people who are flesh and blood like us, of how you receive sinners and freely forgive them through faith in Christ. A prostitute, a cheat, a thief, one on his deathbed, as it were, a man who persecuted the church like the Apostle Paul, those like us who have sinned

against you, mocked you, blasphemed you, or simply just ignored you with an indifferent spirit that said, "I'm going to do what I want. The Jesus stuff is not that important to me." The whole broad spectrum of sinners, Father, finds in Christ one who is willing to receive them if they but come in humble repentant faith. We thank you for that. We thank you for the grandeur of your grace and though perhaps we walked into this room weary with sin, Father, we find our hearts refreshed as we remember our saving brother, the Lord Jesus Christ, who now intercedes at the right hand of the Father on our behalf. Yes, Father, we welcome this opportunity to remember Christ as we share in communion together today and we thank you for it in Jesus' name. Amen.

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