

The True Gospel - David Ravenhill

by From the Pulpit & Classic Sermons

David Ravenhill's sermon illustrates the essence of the true Gospel through the story of a woman who pursued Jesus with humility and a willingness to serve.

Duration: 28:24

Scripture: Psalm 2:12, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 11:29, Matthew 21:31, Mark 14:3-9, Luke 7:37-38, John 12:3

Topics: "Radio"

Description

In this sermon, David Ravenhill discusses the story of a woman who ministered to Jesus in a profound way. He highlights that there are three separate occasions in the gospels where a similar event is recorded. The woman's actions demonstrate humility, as she quietly approaches Jesus and humbly positions herself behind him. Ravenhill emphasizes that the woman's recognition of her sinfulness and her willingness to come to Jesus just as she is exemplify the essence of the gospel.

Transcript

Welcome to From the Pulpit and Classic Sermons. Each week we bring you a different message from some of history's greatest speakers in the Christian faith, and powerful sermons from modern preachers, too. This week we have David Ravenhill with his message, The True Gospel.

We have a story of a woman who came and ministered to the Lord Jesus Christ in such an incredible way. If you have read this story, I'm sure you've seen a similar story in Matthew and Mark, as well as John. The fact is there are three separate occasions that are very similar.

Many people confuse them and think that all four Gospels record the same event. Matthew and Mark record one, Luke records a separate event, John records a separate event again. But I want to borrow from Matthew's account, because Jesus made the statement, wherever the Gospel is proclaimed in all the world, I want you to tell the story of this woman.

In other words, what this woman did on that occasion had a profound impact on the Lord Jesus Christ. Out of all the things that Jesus could have singled out in His life, in His ministry, in His relationships with other people, He chose to say, take this message to the nations. What this woman has done, I want a memorial, I want this to be done in memory of her.

I think of all the women that impacted the life of Jesus. He could have said, wherever the Gospel is proclaimed, I want you to tell them about Mary, my mother. But He never said that.

He could have singled out some other event, and yet it was this story that He chose to place alongside the Gospel. And I've wondered why. And I've come to this conclusion, rightly or wrongly, that this woman, and what she did, epitomizes what the Gospel is all about.

In other words, we can look at the Gospel in theological terms, talk about regeneration, propitiation, sanctification, justification, redemption, all those, you know, great million dollar sort of words. But unless you understand them, it really doesn't mean much. But then you can take the Gospel and you can flesh it out, as it were, and you can exemplify it through the life of a person.

And I think this woman typifies and exemplifies the Gospel better than any other person that I know of. And so let's look at the story together. It says in verse 37, Behold, there was a woman in the city who was a sinner.

And when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume. That little phrase, when she learned that he was reclining in the Pharisee's house. This woman was a pursuer of Jesus, a seeker of Jesus.

She wanted to meet Him, she wanted to know Him. She broke all the sort of the taboos, if you like, of her day. The social realm, the religious realm, the cultural realm.

You don't walk in uninvited into somebody's home. That is not something that we do in any culture that I know of. She was not randomly knocking on doors saying, who is your guest tonight? Oh, so and so, not interested.

Who's your guest tonight? Not interested. No, she was pursuing Jesus Christ. She had a passion.

She was desperate. She was desperate enough again to cross all the protocol of the day and come to this Pharisee's house. How many of you know that sinners and Pharisees don't mix very well? And yet here is a woman, not just an ordinary woman, but a prostitute.

And she is in the Pharisee's house. But she learned that He was there. How did she learn? Well, I can only base this on some various scriptures.

I don't know if what I'm about to say is true, but the possibility of it being right is there. Maybe one day she was coming home from a night of activity, selling her body on the streets, walking through the marketplace, and she paused for a moment because there was a large crowd gathered listening to somebody speaking. And as she paused, she heard for the first time in her life about the love of God.

She heard Jesus Christ talk about God as being a Father, compassionate, kind, merciful. She heard instead of the law of God about the love of God. She heard about cleansing.

She heard about reconciliation. She heard about God's compassion for lost sinners. Maybe that's what drew her.

Or maybe it was different than that. Maybe one day again she was walking through the marketplace, and Jesus was addressing the scribes and the Pharisees. They stood out from the crowd.

These days, you know, we have our clerical collars. In those days, they had their long garments and then their phylacteries. Every time they memorized scripture, you know, they would put it in a little leather pouch.

And of course, the more of these things that you had, the more spiritual you were. They were like an old English sheepdog, you know. They could hardly see them, you know, after a while.

And Jesus said this, prostitutes and tax gatherers will make it into the kingdom of God before you. That is not how you begin a pastor's conference, but that's the way Jesus began. You hypocrites.

And maybe when she heard that, she thought, is it possible that a prostitute like me could actually be part of God's kingdom? Is there such a thing as that sort of cleansing, that sort of reconciliation? Could I be a part of God's kingdom? Did he say that with, you know, a sense of jest, or did he really mean it? I've got to find out more. I've got to meet this man. I've got to talk to this man.

I need to spend time with this man. What if? What if there's a possibility that I could be changed and transformed? And so she makes some inquiries. And so she ends up here in the house of Simon the Pharisee.

You see, she learned that he was reclining. She was pursuing him. She wanted to meet him.

She wanted to know him. She wanted to have an encounter with God. And so she seeks him out.

Now, I don't know if that is accurate in that sense, but I know this, that just that little phrase tells me that she was pursuing him. And she was willing again to walk into a house of a Pharisee, speaks about desperation, speaks about a passion that she had to meet him. She didn't care what men thought.

She didn't care what her reputation was anymore. I've got to meet this man. I know where he is, and I'm going to find him.

So let's look at this story together. The first thing about this woman is she comes as a sinner. It says, Behold, there was a woman in the city who was a sinner.

That's the beginning of the gospel, isn't it? The recognition that I'm a sinner, the recognition that I have a need of a Savior, the recognition that I can't change my life by myself. I can't lift myself up by my own bootstraps, that there is nothing in me, no good thing that dwells in my flesh. I need a Savior.

I need freedom from sin. One of the hardest things to admit, I think, is that we're a sinner. This woman comes, again, just as she is.

As Billy Graham has made that song so popular, just as I am. She doesn't try and cover up. She doesn't try and mask her problems.

She doesn't come trying to, you know, pretend that she's somebody different. No, she comes as a sinner. That's the beginning of the gospel.

We have to recognize that we're sinners. All have sinned, come short of the glory of God. The second thing is she came to the only one that could help her.

She came to the Lord Jesus Christ. She doesn't go to a temple. She doesn't go to some synagogue.

She doesn't go to a priest. She doesn't go to some rabbi. She comes to the Savior of the world, the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's the second phase of the gospel, the recognition that there is only one mediator between God and man. There's only one person that is the way, the truth, and the life. There's only one person that can transform your life, that can save you from sin.

There's only one that ever paid that atoning price and died on the cross, became sin for us. He who knew no sin took your sin and my sin upon himself. And so she comes again to the only one that can set her free.

There's only one person again that can transform your life. I can't. Oh, I can introduce you to Him, but only God Himself can change you.

I'm sure this woman had tried religion before only to find out that she was rejected, only to find out that, listen, when they found out who she was and what she was doing and the lifestyle that she had, we don't want to have anything to do with you. We don't want you a part of our young people's group. We don't want you coming into our church.

You know, we've got standards and so on. Some of the cruelest people in the world are religious people, isn't that right? The harshest language Jesus ever spoke was to the religious community. Some of His greatest illustrations were targeted at exposing the hypocrisy of religious people.

These that were supposed to represent God, but they had no compassion, no love, no kindness. And so she'd been rejected maybe over and over, but she finally found somebody that was tender, compassionate, merciful. And so she comes to the only one that could help her.

The third thing about this woman is she came prepared to give everything that she had. The Bible says she brought with her this alabaster box. If I were to draw from some of the other accounts that are similar, the one lady that brought her alabaster box, the Bible says it was worth 300 denarii.

A denarii was a copper coin that was the equivalent of one day's wages. And it says it was worth over 300 denarii. We have 365 days in a year.

We have 52 Sabbaths in which you did not work. You had the various feast days, and so you end up with about 300 days of work. And this was worth over 300 days' salary.

In other words, she brought a one-year salary to the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what I call extravagant. It's not often that that happens.

We give our tithe, and rightly so, 10 percent, but when do we give 100 percent? When's the last time you looked at your record of what you paid last year in taxes and your income for the year, and you could give that entire amount? I mean, here is a woman that gives every single thing that she has. That's the gospel to me. You see, God is not interested in your sin.

He wants you. Most of the time, we give Him the dirt. We give Him all the filth.

We give Him all the things that we've done that are wrong. We say, Lord, clean me up, and so on. And then we take our clean-up life, and we live it for our own ends.

Oh, we do a little here and a little there for the gospel, but basically, we've never really given God our life. We've just given Him our sin. The Bible says, where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

And it tells me something about this woman. She came prepared, again, to give every single thing to God. That's the gospel.

Love is so amazing. So divine, demands my soul, my life, my all. Are you prepared to give Him everything? Is there something in your life you're withholding and say, God, you can have all this, but don't touch this? That's not the gospel.

He's worthy of everything. Don't hold back. This woman didn't hold back.

That which was the most precious to her, she was willing to lay at His feet, in fact, pour out upon His feet. The next thing about this woman is she comes in brokenness. Verse 38, standing behind Him at His feet, weeping.

Or rather, let me divide that into two categories. She came in humility, first of all, and then she came in brokenness as well. She came in humility.

Notice her approach, standing behind Him at His feet. She does not come in to be in the limelight. She doesn't come in wanting the spotlight.

She doesn't want this to be the center of attention. She doesn't come in, and I imagine that room was filled with at least the 12 disciples and maybe other people that the Pharisee had invited. And she doesn't say, just a minute, just a minute, everybody look this way.

Could I have your attention, please? I'm about to do something that is almost unprecedented. Here's a year's salary. I mean, here's \$100,000, \$200,000.

I'm going to give this to the master, and I want everybody to see what I'm doing. No. Instead, she sort of tiptoes in, and she gets down behind Him.

That's important. You see, if the gospel really has taken root, if you like, in your life, it should produce a humility in your life. The Bible says, take my yoke upon you and learn of me.

Get to know me. Get to know who I am, what I'm like, my nature, my character, for I'm meek and I'm lonely. Jesus was a humble man.

The word humble in the Latin is the word humus. Those of you who know anything about horticulture, agriculture, know that the word humus is the word for dirt, soil. We talk about a person being down to earth.

In other words, he's real. You can sit with him, talk with him. You don't feel like he's looking down his nose at you, that he's, you know, you're almost wasting his time.

He'd rather not be there. He'd rather, you know, you're just sort of tying him up. No, he wants to be there.

He's friendly. He's open. He's the sort of person you can just talk to.

Jesus was that sort of an individual. That's why sinners flocked to Him. He was a friend of publicans and sinners.

Not just friendly. We're taught to be friendly, but you can be friendly without being a friend. You go into the bank and, you know, if you've got any sort of cash in the bank and they know you, you know, good morning, Mr. Brown, good morning, Mr. Cho, you know, good to see you, and they're very, very friendly, but they're not your friend.

Jesus was not just friendly, he was a friend of publicans and sinners. He was a humble man. He didn't go around, again, with a sense of, you know, elitism about him.

And if we are to become like him, there should be a humility in our own lives, standing behind him. Are you prepared to let Jesus be the one that is the center? Are you prepared not to be in the limelight, the spotlight, where it's all about you, where, you know, you want your name to be recognized? I don't think there's anything more repulsive to the kingdom of God than that. And yet, we see it, don't we, so often? It's all the way through the church world.

Everybody has to have a title, apostle, prophet, whatever it is. You know, they walk in with their entourage, they walk in with their bodyguards. Always puzzle me that some of these men are the ones that talk about the presence of God.

I thought he was my shield and my butler. I don't think you needed anybody else. And yet, they walk in as though, you know, God is a million miles away.

Never made sense to me. But they love the limelight. They love the spotlight.

They love titles. They love recognition. She comes and she stands behind him.

The next thing about this woman, she came in brokenness. She stood behind him weeping. I think initially, it was weeping because of her condition.

Weeping out of remorse, out of regret, out of sorrow, tears of repentance. The Bible says, in His light, we will see light. I can't imagine what it must have been like to be in her position again.

A woman that had defiled herself over and over and over again. This body that was supposed to be the temple of the Holy Ghost. And yet, it had been used for every abomination, every conceivable act of immorality.

And yet, here she is in the presence of the spotless Son of God. Remember, Peter on one occasion, he couldn't stand it anymore. And he says, depart from me.

I'm a sinful man, O Lord. I can't stand to be in your presence. The contrast is so great.

And I can't imagine what it must have been like as she knelt there. And all of a sudden, the realization came upon her, this man has never ever sinned. This man has never lusted after a woman like me.

This man has never raised his voice in anger. This man is absolutely sinless. And all of a sudden, she saw herself as she'd never seen herself before.

And she begins to break. She began to weep as she realized, I was created by God and for God. And yet, I've done everything contrary to the ways of God.

And the tears begin to stream down her face. But I'm convinced that she was broken in the presence of God, that there was a washing going on. That as her tears flowed down, that God was washing her on the inside.

And I believe that she felt again that sort of metamorphosis, that change, that transformation. All of a sudden, she felt again, those chains fell off. My heart was free.

She felt clean. And all of a sudden, those tears then become tears now of gratitude, tears of joy, tears of relief. And those tears are just flowing.

You see, the Bible says, a broken and a contrite heart, God cannot refuse. You see, those are essential qualities to accepting Christ. He resists the proud.

He gives grace to the humble. We need the grace of God. This woman needed the grace of God.

That transforming grace, that grace that is greater than all our sin. That grace that can cleanse. Oh, not a grace that permits you to continue in sin, but a grace that has power to break the dominion of sin.

That's what Paul said writing to the Romans. Sins shall no longer have dominion over you because you're not under law, you're under grace. In other words, grace has got a stronger power than the dominion of sin.

Not a weaker power. Grace is God's empowering to break the power of sin over your life. But it comes as we humble ourself.

And then a broken and a contrite heart, God cannot refuse. And so here, she understands. I don't know how well she understood, but certainly she is going through these motions.

They're genuine, they're real. I'm sure she's not thought them out in theological terms. God has broken her heart.

And she stands there again ministering to the Lord. As those tears are flowing, she's washing his feet. You see, that also is the gospel.

Jesus said, the spirit of the Lord is upon me. Not only to preach the gospel, but what? To heal the brokenhearted. To bring recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden and so on.

He's the only one that can put Humpty Dumpty back together again. He's the only one that can repair your life, restore your life. All the king's horses and all the king's men can't do it.

The next thing about this woman is, she came willing to serve. She began to wash his feet. You see, when she entered that house, she became aware of a need that had not been met.

A job that nobody else was willing to do. Everybody else, obviously, this is beneath me. I'm not going to stoop to become a servant.

I'm not going to stoop to wash feet. This was a job that nobody wanted. This was the most despised, despicable job in the roster of events, if you like, that any slave could be involved in.

After all, once you serve somebody for a certain amount of time, then you would, you know, graduate to a better position. But this was reserved for the lowest ranking slave. And it was to stand at the feet and

wash, stand at the door, rather, and wash people's feet.

We need to remind ourselves, they didn't arrive in Toyotas and Nissans and BMWs. Many of them walked those roads, those same roads that they drove their cattle along, and they drove their sheep along, and they drove their goats along, their horses and their mules and their camels and so on. And it was almost impossible to walk those roads without getting something on your feet.

And if it was raining, then the mud and everything else, and it wasn't a job that anybody liked, it was smelly, it was a terrible job. And you had to kneel down, and the foot again was considered, you know, that part of the body that was despised. And yet she saw a need.

Jesus had not had His feet washed. And so she comes along and she takes on the job of a servant. That's the gospel, isn't it? Jesus said, he that would be greatest among you, let him become servant of all.

If I, your master and your Lord, can wash feet, then you should be able to do it. You see, this is the gospel. That's why Jesus said, wherever you go in all the world, tell them about this story, because it epitomizes, if you like, the gospel.

He said to the woman, your faith has saved you, go in peace. This woman came in faith. Faith is so important to God.

Faith is that trigger, if you like, that activates everything. Isn't that right? Without faith, it's impossible to please Him. He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder, that His word is true, we've got to take Him at His word.

And faith reaches out and says, God, I believe. I believe. She came believing that somebody like herself, again, so defiled, so broken, so full of shame, could know what it is to be cleansed and made whole.

And so she reaches out in faith, and Jesus said, your faith has saved you. Go in peace. Before that, He says in verse 48, your sins have been forgiven, the forgiveness of sin.

The next thing about this woman, or the last thing, she came in worship. Notice that Jesus has to address the Pharisee, because He is extremely upset with what is going on. And in fact, when He walks into the room, maybe He was in the kitchen when Jesus arrived, I don't know.

And when He emerges the next time, here is a woman washing His feet, and He's upset to say the least. And He says to Himself this, if this man were really a prophet, He would know what sort of a woman this is. And that's Simon's, I've misjudged this man, I thought he was a prophet.

And Jesus has to defend this woman. He says, Simon, when I came into your house, you weren't standing there to greet Me. Nobody was there washing My feet.

But this woman has not only washed My feet, but she has not ceased to kiss My feet. You see, you only kiss people that you're in love with. And she is kissing and kissing and kissing, she just can't kiss Him enough.

Why is she so full of gratitude, so full of love? It's just flowing out of her. That's the gospel, isn't it? It should bring us into that love relationship. Jesus Christ should become more valuable, if you like, more precious to us than anybody else in the whole world.

Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve. It's the one great ministry that after all the evangelism, church planning, everything else is done and over with, we'll spend the eternity worshipping the Lamb of God. Why not begin now? Kiss the Son, the Bible says, lest He be angry.

And here she comes and she begins to kiss Him, but not only that, she takes her hair. And a woman's hair is her glory, the Bible says. And she is prepared to take her hair and let that hair down and use it as a towel.

You see, a true worshiper does not glory in who they are, but they give God the glory. You're prepared to give Him the glory, to go through life without any name recognition, to go through life without maybe making it into some list and say, Lord, I'm doing it for You, whether I'm recognized or not, I know one day in eternity I will be. This woman isn't concerned about any of that.

She takes her glory and she begins to wash His feet, begins to wipe them with the hair of her head. But you know what? When she left that building, she took with her that aroma of that spikenard. People knew that she'd been with Jesus.

Isn't that the wonderful thing that when we spend time in His presence, people know, listen, I know who you've been with. There's a fragrance. You carry the fragrance of Jesus.

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