

Conversation with Simon the Pharisee

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Date: 22 March 2026

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[0:00] This is a sermon from King's Church West, William. Well, it is really exciting for me to speak to you today because we're going to be continuing our series on conversations with Jesus.

! And to be honest, this is the one that I personally have been really looking forward to because this is an amazing story. And one of the reasons that I love it so much is because as we'll get into the story, lots of you will know, I'm sure, it's a story where there's so much going on.

There's so many different people there. There's so many different people that Jesus is actually speaking to that I think is the most typical conversation that Jesus actually has.

In the sense that he isn't usually in a sort of sterile environment with just one-on-one. There is occasions when he is, so like the conversation with Nicodemus is definitely one-on-one. The conversation with the Samaritan woman is one-on-one.

But usually he's having conversations and he's having a conversation with somebody and then there's all sorts of other people listening in. And that's actually really much more typical of how we live our lives, isn't it?

[1:13] If any of you have had the opportunity to maybe share your faith, to express in your workplace, your friendship group, whoever it is, that you're a Christian, that you follow Jesus, the likelihood is that it probably hasn't just happened in conversations one-on-one.

The likelihood is that other people have been listening in. And I'm going to tell a little story from when I was a very young man, which I think expresses this quite well. So I was actually still at school.

I think I was 17 years old and I hadn't been following Jesus for very long, but I was definitely a Christian. And I was starting to see some fruit in speaking to people about Jesus, sharing with friends and people that went to school and things like that, about who Jesus was.

And I remember it was the summer holidays. So I was at home and a few friends of mine had gone off to, I think, if I remember correctly, it was either Benidorm or Magaluf for a holiday.

I wasn't invited. I can't think why, but nevertheless, I didn't go. But I got a phone call from another friend who also presumably hadn't been invited, saying that something terrible had happened.

[2:21] And one of my friends, Sam, had been in a really bad car accident in, let's say, Benidorm. And he was actually in a coma.

OK. Now, this was in the days before mobile phones. He phoned me on my house phone. Kids, that's these sort of these things. You might find them in museums. They've got a wire attached to them.

And so what we decided to do was we decided to gather together this guy's house. And then we would, the plan was that one of our teachers, the school at this point, had got involved or sort of knew about it.

The teacher would be the person who would receive news and tell us of any updates. Right. So we gathered at this person's house. And after maybe a couple of hours, we got another phone call saying, Listen, it's maybe about eight or nine of us there.

It's looking really, really bad. It looks like Sam might die. And they said, Look, the lady, the teacher, it was a lady called Mrs. Stewart.

[3:29] I don't actually know if she was a Christian. But she said, You might want to consider praying together for Sam. And so I, as far as, well, no, I mean, I know that I was the only Christian in the room.

So they all looked at me and said, What do we do? And I, at this point, I'd probably been to maybe like three prayer meetings. And I said, Well, there's a song, Let's Go Down to the River to Praise. And so I said, Let's go down to the river. So we got on the Metro, which is like the underground thing in Newcastle where I grew up. Went down to Central Station, walked down to the River Tyne. The River Tyne is really fancy now. Back then it was kind of like just warehouses and stuff like that. And this grimy old thing. And we stood there in a little circle. There's probably about eight of us. And we had the most surreal prayer meeting that I've ever been to.

And basically what we did, we went around one by one. And the prayer that everybody prayed went something like this. God, I don't know if you're really there. But if you are, would you make it so Sam doesn't die?

[4:37] That was pretty much the prayer that went around one by one. But there was one person who prayed a little bit differently. My good friend, a guy called Andy.

Andy was quite a sort of vibrant, quite an aggressive person. Really good at sports. Now, while some people had been open to me speaking about faith, he was always very dismissive, quite mockery.

But he was my good friend. He was probably my best friend. And he prayed this prayer that was almost like, God, I've been turning my back on you all my life.

I know that I've tried not to follow you. But if you will do this, if you will make it so he doesn't die, then I will follow you. And I'm standing there going, oh, that's quite interesting.

And so we do this thing. And eventually, you know, we can't think of anything else to do. So we just, one of our friends in this little group, his uncle owned a hotel in a place called Jesmond. And I know if any of you know Newcastle, Jesmond's a really fancy area.

[5:40] That probably sounds, wow, that sounds really swanky. It was a total dive. But we used to go there sometimes. And so we went there and we were just sort of sitting around until quite late at night. And we're all sitting around and we're talking about this.

And eventually we get around to talk about this thing. You know, could it be, could God, you know, could God save Sam? Could God heal Sam? Could God make it so he doesn't die? And of course, we still haven't had any news about it.

No mobile phones, nothing like that. And basically, through the course of this conversation, I lead my friend Andy to faith. Okay, so we pray a prayer, a sort of sinner's prayer, if you like.

He confesses his sins. He says he wants to follow Jesus, all that stuff. But of course, this isn't just me and him just chatting one-to-one. There's about eight of us sitting around in a circle. Okay, and so for the next couple of hours, every single person speaks to me about either, you know, there's a whole different smorgasbord of reactions.

Why they think that was a ridiculous thing to do. Why they're not quite ready, but it does sound really interesting. Everyone's got a different reaction that goes through. Now, I should probably just give two little bits of information before I kind of move on.

[6:50] First of all, the good news is that Sam didn't die. He did survive. So that's the great news. He did survive. And I think he moved on to London at some point.

And as far as I know, he's living a happy, successful life down there. My friend Andy, sadly, although he did kind of go to church a bit and sort of try to find out what it was to follow Jesus, he didn't really move on.

So now he's not really living a Christian life. But the point is that when you're speaking to something about faith, any conversation about Jesus, including the conversations that Jesus has, it's not just one-to-one.

It's not just me and you. There's a whole load of people listening. And that's definitely the case with this story. So hopefully I've whetted your appetite. And we're going to get into the story of Jesus' conversation with Simon the Pharisee.

So it's Luke chapter 7, verses 36 to 50. Here we go. When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table.

[7:54] A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house. So she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. As she stood behind him at his feet, weeping, she began

to wet his feet with her tears.

Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, If this man were a prophet, he would know who was touching him and what kind of woman she is, that she is a sinner.

Jesus answered him, Simon, I have something to tell you. Tell me, teacher, he said. Two people owed money to a certain money lender.

One owed him 500 denarii and the other 50. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more? Simon replied, I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.

You have judged correctly, Jesus said. Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.

[9:07] You did not give me a kiss, but this woman from the time I entered has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven as her great love has shown.

But whoever has been forgiven little, loves little. Then Jesus said to her, Your sins are forgiven. The other guests began to say among themselves, Who is this who even forgives sins?

Jesus said to the woman, Your faith has saved you. Go in peace. Okay. Isn't that a great story?

There's just so much going on there. So there's three characters in this story, isn't there? There's obviously Jesus, who we know. There's Simon the Pharisee. And then there's this woman.

So let's get into them. So we know Jesus. We'll put Jesus aside for just a second, but we'll get into this fellow, Simon the Pharisee. Now, anybody who knows the Bible, anybody who's read the New Testament knows, as soon as they hear the P word, as soon as they hear Pharisee, or the P word, or not the P word, the Pharisee, as soon as they hear about the Pharisee, that's a, that's a, they're baddies, aren't they?

[10:24] Boo, Pharisees. We don't like, they're like the pantomime villains of the Bible. But Simon, I think Simon's just a little bit different. Because you see, Simon does something, but it doesn't really happen with Pharisees.

It's, he invites Jesus to dinner. Now, inviting someone to dinner, inviting someone to dinner for us, that's an expression of friendship, isn't it? That's a, saying, I want to be your friend. You come round to my house for dinner.

In, in these, in the Middle Eastern times, the ancient world, it was, it really was an amazing expression of friendship to say, come and eat with me. Let's be brothers. Let's share a table. Let's, let's be one. And so, so, so Simon gives Jesus an invitation.

Jesus is an itinerant preacher, as you know, and he's come to town. Simon's extended this invitation. Do you know, I think Simon, I think he hasn't got the memo. I think he didn't get the email. Pharisees don't like Jesus. So I think he's done this. And then his Pharisee mates have gone, Simon, don't you know who this fellow is? He goes around saying that the, the love of God extends to people like prostitutes and tax collectors and Gentiles.

[11:29] What are you doing inviting this fellow round for dinner? And so Simon has to, he's in a bit of a quandary. He has to sort of backtrack. He's got to, he's got to find a way to, to be consistent and still extend the invitation to Jesus, but at the same time, impress his Pharisee mates.

So we know he, so they know that he, he isn't letting them down. You know, that he isn't just welcoming this, this, this crazy preacher who goes around with these, these strange doctrines about the love of God.

So this is what he decides to do. He says that he will bring, he will bring Jesus along, but he will be really, really rude to him. So what does he do?

Well, let's just suppose for a second, let's suppose that Luke being a friendly, hospitable fellow invites me round for dinner, as he has done many occasions. We've many, I've enjoyed his hospitality, his shah's wonderful cooking.

And, not Luke's cooking. Let's say that I get there and Luke, Luke fails to anoint my head with oil.

[12:39] Let's say, what else does Simon, what else does Simon do? Let's say he fails to give me water for my feet. Let's say he fails to give me a kiss. Perish the thought.

Now, of course, I wouldn't think anything of that, obviously, because clearly it's culturally specific, isn't it? That's obviously what people did in that particular time and place. But this would be more the equivalent of me kind of knocking on the door, and Luke saying, oh, I can't be bothered to answer me.

I'll just let him wait outside for a few minutes. He'll come in eventually. Or, and eventually when I come in, instead of greeting me with a handshake or a hug, he, he, he'll just say, yeah, all right. If there's people there who I don't know, he wouldn't give me the, you know, wouldn't introduce me to them and say, oh, wouldn't offer me a seat, wouldn't offer me a cup of tea or a coffee. Of course, Luke would never do this because he's a very hospitable fellow.

But I'm just saying, if he did all of those things, I would feel really awkward. Wouldn't I be thinking, is this, am I, am I welcome here? Is this person my friend?

[13:42] Is, does he, does he want me to come and eat with him? And, and to be honest, being a bit of a weak, lily-livered sort of person, I would probably storm out in a huff. That's probably what I would do, right?

Jesus, doesn't do that. Now, everybody, the people in the room, you know, we've already established, lots of people there, lots of guests. Everybody is looking at us. Jesus is the, the star attraction.

He is the guest of honor. Nobody could have failed to have noticed, how Simon treats Jesus. Jesus doesn't seem remotely bothered. What does he do?

Jesus reclines at the table. Now, I think people would have seen this and gone, is, is he, does he not see what's going on here?

Jesus has just taken, he's sat down, he's taken the place of honor at the table. Does, is he, is he a bit fake? Does he not see that he is being insulted?

[14:44] Like this. But nevertheless, that's what he does. And then something, extraordinary happens. We meet, the person who is described as a woman, of that city.

But before I describe to you what happens next, I've just got to explain something, about the way people would eat their meals, at this point in time. Now again, if I go back to my dinner party with Luke, I would expect to, knock on the door, chap, chap, chap, Luke would welcome me in, and he would probably close the door behind me, and then he would bring me in, and show me to a seat, and I would sit down, and enjoy my meal at the table.

Right? That's how we would normally, that's how I would envision a dinner party going. Yeah? It was different, for these people. This is what they did. For one thing, they wouldn't be sat at a table, there was this side.

Instead, the table would be a low table, about as high maybe as your knees, and this is what they would do. They would lie down, so say the table's here, have you seen me? They would lie down, and they would recline on their elbow, and they would eat, like this.

So their heads would be facing, towards each other, at the table, okay, understand? And their feet, are out the back, right? But the other thing, is that they're probably not indoors.

[15:57] They're actually probably, more like in some kind of courtyard, which would be publicly available, for the people of the town, to come, and listen to the conversation. So the honoured guests, the people who would be invited, they would be eating at the table, with their heads, pointing forward, and then other people, would be in the background, just listening to the conversation.

It was kind of like a public event. Right? So with that in mind, you can see, what happens next.

Jesus, goes to the place of honour. Interestingly, he does, exactly the thing, that he tells his disciples, not to do, when you go to a dinner, do not take the place of honour, lest you be, asked to move down.

He does take the place of honour, seemingly oblivious, to the insults, that have been shown him.

And, and then something extraordinary happens. A woman appears, from the shadows, and anoints his feet, with her perfume, wetting his feet, with her tears, as she's weeping, and drying his

feet, with her hair, which is laid down, like this.

Now what on earth, is going on, here? Now this woman, is described, in the, in, in, in, in every translation, of this, is something like, a woman of the city, a woman of the town, that's the, the phrase that's used, that is an idiom, that is, the secret meaning is, it's a prostitute.

In this particular, translation says, a woman who had lived, a sinful life, is how it's described, but that's what it means, okay, so, so she is known, to everybody around, that she's, she's a prostitute, and she does this thing, now, who is she?

[17:38] Well, we don't really know, she doesn't, we don't get her name, it seems certain, that at some point, maybe that very day, she has come across Jesus, maybe she's had a conversation, with him, maybe she, has heard, his message, of love, and forgiveness, to the most unlikely, of people, and this, woman, this, this prostitute, who has been told, by the religious authorities, that because of her, sinful life, she is excluded, from the people of God, she is cast out, from God's presence, she is heard, from Jesus, the son of God himself, that that is not true, that, even, someone like her, can be included, she will, turn her back, on her sinful ways, if she will, walk with Jesus, and accept his message, of love and grace, then she too, is included, in the people of God, and so she is so, overcome with emotion, she wants to be there, to thank Jesus, she knows she's never, going to be an honoured guest, but she'll hang around, in the shadows, maybe, maybe she'll get the chance, to speak with him, and just thank him, for everything, that he's done for her, but then she witnesses, this, this insult, to Jesus, and she cannot bear it, she thinks to herself,

I have to do, something, and so, she does something, extraordinary, she has, what's described, as an alabaster jar, of perfume, now, this is something, that would hang around, the neck, of, of wealthy women, but also, also prostitutes, as a, as a means, to, sort of, to basically say, right guys, I'm available, the smell, the lovely smell, that would give off, and be worth, a lot of money, just a little kind of pot, of this perfume, hang around her neck, and she took it, and she broke it, it was probably worth, thousands of pounds, and she poured it, on Jesus' feet, as a direct, as a direct contrast, to the, the, the welcome, that he had been given, by Simon the Pharisee, so, so what is she doing here, well, this is what she's doing, she's thanking Jesus, but also she is saying this, my old life, the old life, that's represented, in this little jar, of perfume on my neck, if what you are saying, to me is true, my old life, is over,

I cannot go back to it, I will not go back to it, I, I burn all the bridges, behind me, that was my old way of life, and, even if it costs me, everything, Jesus, I am gonna, I'm gonna follow you, I'm even gonna, humiliate myself, in front of all the townspeople, if it just means, that I get close to you, that I get close to you, now, of course, the rest of the people, in the room, cannot fail, to notice, that this is going on, and indeed, Simon himself, thinks to himself, he thinks to himself, if this man were a prophet, he would know, what kind of woman, this is, and actually, this is good news for Simon, because this is vindication for him, because his, his, his poor welcome of Jesus, is vindicated, by the fact that clearly,

Jesus, is totally unable, to recognize, who this woman is, he's clearly, not a prophet, and so Jesus gets him, with one of his, wonderful stories, why don't we just, get that back up, Davey, and we'll read, from verse 36, you shouldn't have been, sitting on a set either, by the way, you didn't know, it's like, didn't you, we'll go from, sorry, Davey, verse 40, okay, Simon, I have something to tell you, tell me teacher, he says, two people owed money, to a certain money lender, one owed him 500 neri, the other 50, neither of them, had the money, to pay him back, so if he gave the debts of both, now which of them, will love him more, Simon replied, I suppose the one, who had the bigger debt forgiven, you've judged correctly, Jesus said, they turned towards the woman, and said to Simon, do you see this woman,

I came into your house, you did not give me, any water for my feet, but she wet my feet, with her tears, and wiped them, with her hair, you did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, it has not stopped, kissing my feet, you did not put oil, on my head, but she has poured perfume, on my feet, therefore I tell you, her many sins, have been forgiven, as her great love, has shown, but whoever, has been forgiven little, loves little, then Jesus said to her, your sins are

forgiven, the other guests, began to say among themselves, who is this, who even forgives sins, Jesus said to the woman, your faith has saved you, go in peace, so, Jesus presents this, this very simple story, this very easy contrast, between someone who owns, who owes, sorry, a great deal of money, and somebody who owes, quite a lot of money, but, but, a lot less, and they, the debtor, sorry, the, the, the lender, forgives them both, and clearly the one, who is forgiven more, loves more, and so Jesus says to Simon, he says, you know, you attempted, to lift yourself up, in the eyes of others, by humiliating me, but this woman, has humiliated herself, in order, to lift me up, says Jesus, your lack of love, towards me, shows, that you have been forgiven little, the abundant love, of this woman, at my feet, shows that she, has been forgiven, much, she is like, the, the man in the temple, who beats his breast, and says, forgive me Lord, a sinner, compared to the Pharisee, who says,

[24:16] I thank you, I'm not like that publican, over there, she's like him, because she, she has much love, because, she knows, she has been forgiven much, and you know, Simon, is typical, of a religious, attitude, he is typical, of an attitude, which says, yeah, you know, I want to, invite Jesus, to, to debate, I want to hear a bit about him, I want to judge him, I want him to sit, under my rationality, under my arguments, under what I think, is true, that's a typical, religious attitude, but I don't want him, to come close to me, I don't want him, to touch me, I don't want, him to affect my emotions, to affect my life, the woman, has completely, the opposite, opinion, she wants, to lift Jesus up, she wants, to touch him, she wants, to let him, into her heart, she wants, to put her past, behind him, to follow him, she wants, to give everything, to him, even if it costs her, everything, you know,

I, when I see, religion, when I see, church life, which is, a bit emotionless, a bit rational, it, it makes me sad, because, following Jesus, it is emotional, just think, what he has done, for us, he has taken us, out of death, and brought us, into life, he has given us, by his own death, forgiveness, of sins, he has, given us the right, to become children, of God, of the father, if you can't, get a little bit, emotional about that, I do wonder, if you really know him, if you really love him, if you really, truly, want to walk with him, because, these things are emotional, aren't they, the woman has exactly, the right attitude, and you know, it's a funny thing, as I was reading that, and thinking about that, I was thinking, does she go too far, is it a bit much, even, notwithstanding, what I've just said, about being emotional, is it, just a little bit, is it just a bit, too excruciatingly, embarrassing, what she does, and, I actually think, maybe it is, but, having said that, is Jesus, going to pull her up for it, no way, because he knows, what she has gone through, he knows the sacrifice, that she has made, out of love for him, maybe she does go a bit far, but who cares, because it is better, to go too far, than not far enough, and you know, well how does Jesus know, what it is like, to humble himself, well, Jesus humbled himself, by coming to earth, to live, as a servant, remember Jesus came, not to be served, but to serve, the Lord of glory, the one who created us all, the one who created the universe, he came, he humbled himself, and he knows, that a greater humility, is coming, he knows, that he, is going to the cross, where he will be beaten, he will be stripped, and naked and bleeding, he will be crucified, before mankind, people will, pass him, and shout insults at him, and say, he saved himself, like he saved others, why can't he save himself, he will be forced, to endure those insults, he will be utterly humbled, and why is he willing, to go through this, it's because, he knows, that unlike Simon, he will be vindicated, he'll be vindicated, because he will defeat death, and he will come back, to life, and he will show, that he has defeated, death, forever, and for all time, so that people like you, people like me, people like the woman, at his feet, can also receive, eternal life, with him, you know, you know, even in a, a small room like this, there is probably, Simon's, and there's probably, women of the city, let's call them here, people who, who think, yeah, I'll take as much of Jesus, as I want, I'm interested in the ideas, I'm interested in listening, but ultimately, I will judge him, a religious attitude, there are people here, who think, Jesus could never forgive me, for things that I've done, well, the good news, is that, whoever you are, whether you are a Simon, or whether you are, like the woman, Jesus's grace, and his love, extends to you, isn't it interesting, that Jesus, even at this stage, he could easily, have walked out, he could have taken, the woman with him, he could have joined up, with his faithful band, of, prostitutes, and tax collectors, and pagans, and all the rest of them, he could have done that, but he still extends, the

invitation of grace, and favour, to Simon, and he does the same today, whoever you are, whether you're a religious person, who's a bit like Simon, or whether you're more, like the woman at his feet, Jesus's love, and grace, extends to you, why don't we just, take a moment, of, I'll just lead us in prayer, in fact Luke, maybe you could just play for us, I think it would just be great, just invite the Holy Spirit, to be amongst us, and perhaps we could stand together, as we finish, just, let's just, I would just love us, just to take this moment, to, just to come before God, maybe it's a moment, of repentance for you, maybe you recognise yourself, in one of those two characters, and, and you want to say, Lord, forgive me, I've been a bit like that, or maybe you're, maybe you're just, so amazed, at the fact that, the grace of God, could extend to you, that, that you are included, as well, but you know that, like the woman, you have to smash that jar, that represents your old life, you've got to turn your back, on certain things,

[31:01] Lord, we thank you for your grace, which extends to all of us, whoever we are, whatever we've done, whatever our attitude has been, whether it's been cold, and cynical, and hard hearted, or whether it's just been, an attitude of God's grace, couldn't, couldn't extend to me, Lord, I pray for anyone here, who feels like they're in, one of those two places, and I just invite them, to pray this prayer, repentance to me, because in the end, we're all the same, whichever one of those two, places we find ourselves, thank you Lord Jesus, your grace, extends to me, let's pray with me, if that's you, thank you Lord Jesus, your grace, and your love, and your favour, even extends to me, despite the things, that I've done, despite the attitudes, I've had, despite turning my back, on you, Lord, I lift the, the things that I've, done wrong, to you, and I ask for your forgiveness,

I pray today God, that you would, take away my sin, you give me newness of life, I would walk with you, forever, thank you Lord, that this is a promise of grace, that you give to us, hallelujah, amen, a sin, a sin, a sin, a sin, a sin, a sin, Let's wait.