

## The Key to Salvation

July 14, 2019

Luke 7:36-8:3

When I was about ten, I got the coolest gift in my eyes: a house key. My parents had one, my brothers each had their own, each set of grandparents had one, the maid had one, and I'm sure other people had copies as well. So, for me to get my own house key was the coolest thing in the world for me.

Well, that didn't last too long, though, because then everyone had house keys *and* car keys. So, I wanted one of those, too. Eventually I got a car key, but by then, I was wanting off the island I lived on and space from my parents. So, a key to somewhere other than my car and my parents' house was the next best thing. Well, I had a dorm for four years of college, but sharing a room with three other guys wasn't my style.

At this point in my life, I have a key to mine and Katie's house, my parents' house, my car, Katie's car, two keys to different doors in the church, and of course, the key to Katie's heart. Once Katie and I have kids and they grow up, we'll probably have keys to their houses as well. This thought made me realize just what keys represent: trust and privilege. My parents trusted me with a house key. The DMV in MI and my parents trusted me to not drive like a crazy person. The loan agency trusts Katie and I will make the monthly, designated payments on the house we live in. So, what then does it take to get the ultimate level of trust and privilege: a key to Heaven, for God to give us a key to God's kingdom? According to the reading today, there are two big things that get us the divine key.

The first half of the "key to Heaven" is faith. In the reading today, Jesus uses a somewhat common phrase for him: "Your faith has made you well." It wasn't that she was crying, kissing his feet, using expensive oils to anoint his feet, or used her own hair to dry his feet after washing them with her own tears. It wasn't that the Pharisee didn't wash his feet, didn't anoint his head, or didn't kiss his cheek.

Picture the scene in your mind. We are not told if Jesus is standing or sitting, just that he is in the Pharisee's home during this scene. The woman comes in, washes his feet with her tears, dries them with her own hair, kisses his feet, and anoints his feet with oil. For her to be able to do this, she couldn't do it standing up in front of him. She couldn't even do it sitting in front of him. She had to be bowed down/prostrated before him. She had to be physically on her knees, face towards the ground, away from his face, to do this. In other words, she was doing to Jesus what common folk generally do before royalty, a sign of not being worthy to look upon the face of this person.

Keep in mind, Jesus walked everywhere. Even with sandals, his feet would be dried, calloused, and dirty from the land he walked on. His feet possibly came into contact with all sorts of animal droppings, potentially human droppings, dirt, and grime. Imagine kissing someone's feet who had just walked through sand, dirt, maybe animal droppings, or at the bare minimum had been walking for a few miles. I don't know about you, but I wouldn't kiss Katie's feet after she walked a few miles in shoes that keep all of these things out. I know she wouldn't kiss mine after the same walk either. She even said so on the cruise when we happened to walk in on a talk of what to shop for in Alaska. The speaker asked if anyone's spouse had smelly feet, Katie was the only one to raise her hand. She got a pair of socks to give me made of bamboo for throwing me under the bus, and I have them on today. I digress, though. This woman is kissing

his feet, which is easily a risk to her own health, depending on what was on them. Still, her faith is so strong that, in her mind, the ends justify the risk.

Her actions are backed by Galatians 2:15-21. Here, Paul is writing to the Galatians about “salvation by faith/grace,” something we as Presbyterians believe. Essentially, this belief dictates that our actions do not increase or decrease our chances in getting into Heaven or being saved; that it is our faith (whether or not we believe Jesus is the Savior promised by the prophets) that grants us access. Verse 16: “Yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law.” It is not the actions themselves that grant the woman forgiveness, but the faith expressed through the actions that gives it to her.

This then leads to the second half of the equation to getting the Divine Key: confession. If we leave it at “faith in Jesus gives you the key,” that creates a huge loophole. Anyone can say, “I believe Jesus is my savior.” If it were as simple as simply saying that sentence whenever asked but not giving any “backbone” to it (for lack of a better phrase), then the need for a conscience goes out the window. Anyone could express belief, kill/steal/cause harm in any of its forms, and not have to feel a single drop of guilt for any of it. Our faith in Christ Jesus needs to be backed by confession.

There are many examples of this in the Bible. Ps. 5 is a psalm of confession. The speaker starts off with saying, “Give ear to my words, O Lord . . . O Lord, in the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I plead my case to you, and watch.” The speaker then spends a couple verses talking about how God takes no delight in the sins of this world, nor does God show mercy to those who, lie, deceive, are bloodthirsty, or are boastful. The speaker then returns to talking about him-/herself, saying, “But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house.” The speaker recognizes the power of confession. The speaker is sharing here that knowledge with us, the readers and the listeners. Ps. 32 talks broadly about happiness for those who are forgiven. V. 5: “Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and did not hide my iniquity; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,’ and you forgave the guilt of my sin.” 2 Samuel 11 and 12: Nathan confronts King David about his having a good man killed so that David could have the dead man’s wife as his wife. 12:13: “David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the Lord.’ Nathan said to David, ‘Now the Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die.’”

In each of these situations, forgiveness followed confession without exception. In each of these cases, though, we also see that God does not just automatically cast aside the sins of the speaker. The sins needed to be confessed in each case. So is it also true for today’s reading.

The woman bows down before Jesus in a manner designating submission to him, giving him control over her. She casts her face away from his as if to say, “I am not worthy to look upon the face of one as righteous as you.” She is washing his feet with her tears. To fully wash a foot with tears requires a lot of tears, not just a couple. She washed his feet, plural, meaning she was not just saddened by her sin. She was mortified. She was scared witless and is absolutely distraught over what she had done. Though she does not say anything this entire time, the message of her confession still comes through to us. Through confession and faith, this woman, scorned as she may be, is forgiven of all transgressions. We can learn much from this gospel reading today.

To get that ultimate privilege, to get the key takes two things: faith and confession. Faith does not disqualify us from having to self-reflect and see our own wrongdoings, and confession

is not a sign of little faith. If anything, confession is a sign of great faith, for just as the woman submitted herself before Jesus in faith, confession is the means by which we submit ourselves before God, the means by which we let God determine what our punishment should be and say, "I'll accept whatever you deem necessary."

The path to getting our last house key isn't easy by any extent, but Jesus has shown us what we must do and how we must be to get it. We can rest assured that Jesus would not want to steer us wrong, because Jesus, much like the Triune God, wants one thing above all: to give us all our own divine house key that we, the prodigal children, might finally be able to come home.