

Loved
February 21, 2021
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Luke 7:40-50

In verse 42 of today's text Jesus posed a question: *"When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?"*

Sometimes those of us who were raised in the church and professed faith in Christ at an early age may be self-conscious that we lack a dramatic testimony. When we hear about people who were saved from terrible immorality, a life of crime, or near-death addictions, we might feel our story is just "lame." One day Pastor Jeremy and I were comparing our similar backgrounds and he commented about how blessed we are because of what God spared us from as early converts.

A couple of weeks ago as we studied Luke 5 about Jesus calling His inner circle, I made a statement: *"Smelly fishermen and dirty sinners make the best disciples."* One of the most amazing things about the grace of God is the potential He sees in every soul He longs to save. That potential is most dramatic when He sees what His grace can do in the life of someone "sinking deep in sin."

Big Idea: Jesus wants to save anyone who will turn to Him in faith. No one is too bad, too entangled, or too far to be transformed into a new creation in Christ. The sinner who acknowledges great forgiveness will demonstrate great love for Him.

The scene opens at the home of a religious leader, a Pharisee, named Simon. He had invited Jesus for dinner. Though the Pharisees opposed Jesus, He would not decline to interact with them. As was customary they ate at a table low to the floor while reclining on cushions with their feet extended behind them. The house was surrounded by the curious. Jesus was a public figure, the doors were open, and the uninvited could watch and listen. Just then perhaps the MOST uninvited and unwelcomed bystander, broke through the invisible social barrier and into the circle of guests. *"What is SHE doing here? Everyone in town knows about her and the life SHE has lived! How dare she crash this party!"* Then she does the unthinkable, she not only approaches Jesus but she touches, no kisses His feet. *"What's in that bottle? It smells like anointing oil. She's rubbing it softly on Jesus feet. Why is she crying? Why is she using her long hair to dry her tears from His feet? Why is Jesus allowing this to happen?"* Simon the Pharisaical host thought: *"If this man is a prophet, He would know about her and wouldn't allow such a disgusting sinner to touch Him much less in this manner. How scandalous!"* Just then Jesus finally speaks. His words are not to her, but to Simon:

⁴⁰ And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher." ⁴¹ "A certain moneylender had two debtors.

One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" ⁴³ Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." ⁴⁴ Then 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. ⁴⁵ You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. ⁴⁷ Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." ⁴⁸ And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." ⁴⁹ Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" ⁵⁰ And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

- Once again we see Jesus demonstrating the truth of His statement in Luke 19:10: "...*the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.*"
- He didn't come to fit in with the prominent or even the religious.
- His forgiveness is for people who know how much they need it; those most "mired" in the quicksand of sin. As He stated in Luke 5:31: "*Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.*"
- Jesus' forgiveness and salvation are gifts that can't be earned, but they should elicit a response in the heart of the believer. The shameful, "party-crashing" woman who was forgiven much responded by loving much!
- What are the lessons from this ancient account for 21st century people?
- First, let's clarify some facts: There are two similar incidents in Jesus time on earth. Both involved a host named Simon and a woman anointing Jesus feet with tears, oil, and kisses.
- The account in John 12:1-8 happened in Bethany. That Simon was a healed leper, and the woman was Mary the sister of Lazarus. Her actions were not only about love for Jesus but also a symbol of His coming death.
- Nothing in scripture indicates either situation involved Mary Magdalene.
- Let's observe the actions and statements of each "character" in this story.
- First, there's Simon the Pharisee. It's clear that Simon's strategy for living a godly life was to stay as far away from "dirty sinners" as possible.
- For all we know he might have been one of the Pharisees in Luke 5 so offended that Jesus would "eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"ⁱ
- It's clear that Simon's "evangelism" strategy was something along the lines of "*Clean up your act and then God will love you.*" Clearly, Simon never stayed for the invitation hymn, "*Just as I am without one plea.*"
- I've stated before that there are two big obstacles to people receiving Christ's free gift of salvation.
- Some believe they are too bad to be saved. Others believe they are good enough and don't need to be saved. Simon was obviously in "camp #2."
- Another parable Jesus told in Luke 18 about a Pharisee and a tax collector illustrates the contrast between Simon and the repentant woman.

¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' ¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." - Luke 18:11–14 (ESV)

- Speaking of parables, let's go back to the one Jesus shared with Simon.
- In verses 41-43 He told of a creditor and two debtors. One owed two months wages while the other owed ten times that. Neither could pay.
- The creditor (with no explanation given to us) "graciously" forgave both.
- We're reminded of that anonymous but powerful quote: *"Jesus came to pay a debt He didn't owe because we owed a debt we couldn't pay."*
- The Greek root word for "cancelled the debt" means "graciously forgave."
- Jesus asked the pivotal question: *"Which of them will love him more?"*
- Simon couldn't deny the logic but he still "hedged" a bit, *"I suppose the one he forgave more."* Jesus still gave him credit for a correct answer.
- Verse 44 begins with, "Turning to the woman..." Let's do that ourselves.
- Jesus was still speaking to Simon but praising the actions of the woman.
- Let's understand some basics of being a good host in that culture.
- Roads were dusty and sandals allowed that dust to cake on feet. A minimally gracious host would offer the guest a bowl of water to wash.
- The climate could be harsh and dry. A really gracious host would offer sweet smelling oil as a soothing moisturizer for the guest.
- Simon had done neither for Jesus. Was he simply a klutz as a host or did he only consider Jesus there for scrutiny rather than an honored guest?
- By contrast, Jesus pointed out that this shameful woman knew more about honoring someone you love than the educated Pharisee did.
- Let this be a lesson for those of us who may have a tendency to live in the "bubble" of having been saved at a young age and in the church for years.
- We've all seen the enthusiasm of a new convert who is so grateful for the forgiveness of Christ and the hope of eternity that they can't do enough to show their love for Him. They are ON FIRE while us "veteran" followers might be thinking to ourselves, *"Slow down you're making us look bad!"*
- Simon saw a shameful woman, but Jesus saw a grateful follower.
- Simon didn't believe she could ever live down her bad reputation.
- Jesus saw her potential as a fully forgiven, on-mission child of the King!
- This woman was grateful beyond embarrassment! The prying eyes of the self-righteous church people wouldn't keep her from worshipping her Lord.
- *"Her actions broke all social protocols. She entered a house uninvited. She approached a man who was not a near relative. She wept profusely, which would make most men extremely uncomfortable. With her tears, she assumed the role of a slave and washed Jesus' feet. She used her hair to wipe Jesus' feet, not merely because she could not ask the host for*

a towel but as a further demonstration of her humility. Finally, she poured out expensive perfume not on Jesus' head, as might be customary, but on His feet.”ⁱⁱ

- What can we learn from the woman? When someone really understands the sin in their life and really recognizes what Jesus did for them on the cross, get ready to watch a powerful display of life-change. Watch as that sinful “caterpillar” is transformed into a “butterfly” of new creation in Christ.
- As we said before, *“dirty sinners make the best disciples.”*
- Jesus said to Simon, *“...[H]er sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love.”* Simon could have learned a thing or two!
- Then Jesus said to the woman, *“Your sins are forgiven... Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”*ⁱⁱⁱ Whatever her past was, her future was peace!
- At this point we should expect the church crowd to rejoice.
- Instead, they again wondered: *“Who is this, who even forgives sins?”*
- They missed the point. Instead of rejoicing at another sinner saved, they were obsessing over Jesus’ display of His deity and grace.

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- Our Explore the Bible Leader’s Guide has a terrific line: *“Great mercy begets great love.”* This woman was forgiven much so she loved much.
- Unfortunately, Simon the religious man was so focused on HER sinful past he couldn’t see the SAVED potential Jesus saw. For that matter, Simon didn’t see that he TOO was a sinner like her; like we all are!
- Thinking about this woman’s tender, emotional display of worship and love for Jesus, I remembered a song by the Gaither Vocal Band:

*“I’m resting and growing, In His strong embrace
I’ve traded performance, For amazing grace
My soul is at rest, but I still must rejoice
When I think of the day, That I heard His voice*

*What a relief, Because I can’t earn my way
When I come up empty, My father pays
I’m learning to live, And I’m learning to die
And one of these days, I’ll be learning to fly*

*Chorus: He said child you’re forgiven, Forgiven and free
He said it, I heard it, Sweet victory
The future can never, Intimidate me
Since I’ve been forgiven, Forgiven and free”*

- Jesus wants to save anyone who will turn to Him in faith.
- No one is too bad, too entangled, or too far to be transformed into a new creation in Christ. The sinner who acknowledges great forgiveness will demonstrate great love for Him. What a lesson for all of us today!

ⁱ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Lk 5:30). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

ⁱⁱ Explore the Bible Leader's Guide – Lifeway 2021

ⁱⁱⁱ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [*Holy Bible: New Living Translation*](#) (Lk 7:47–50). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.