

“Forgiveness: The Hidden Root of Great Love” Luke 7:36-50, Sermon Notes
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Saving Grace Bible Church
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Morning Worship Service

Text:

“Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him. And He entered the Pharisee's house, and reclined *at the table*.³⁷ And behold, there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining *at the table* in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume,³⁸ 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.³⁹ 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.”⁴⁰ And Jesus answered and said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” And he replied, “Say it, Teacher.”⁴¹ “A certain moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.”⁴² “When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. Which of them therefore will love him more?”⁴³ Simon answered and said, “I suppose the one whom he forgave more.” And He said to him, “You have judged correctly.”⁴⁴ And 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 she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet.⁴⁶ “You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume.”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.”⁴⁸ And He said to her, “Your sins have been forgiven.”⁴⁹ And those who were reclining *at the table* with Him began to say to themselves, “Who is this *man* who even forgives sins?”⁵⁰ And He said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” (Luke 7:36-50 NAS)

Textual Purpose: To teach that those who recognize their need for forgiveness will love Christ very much

Sermon Purpose: To encourage God’s people to understand their need for forgiveness so that they will love Christ more

Introduction

We have started to look at Jesus’ Teaching on Forgiveness. Our first look was from Matt 18:21-35 – We saw that forgiveness is not fair, it is merciful

Paradigm principles:

1. Our forgiveness of others cannot be exhausted
2. Forgiveness goes beyond our rights and what is fair and does the unexpected. It is a Lavish gift
3. God’s forgiveness of us obligates us to be forgiving towards others
4. Forgiveness must be from the heart

This is God’s pattern in forgiveness. We now continue our look at forgiveness by turning to account found in Luke 7

This is one of the greatest accounts in the NT

- Contrasted in this picture is the self-righteous spiritual leaders and a broken sinner
- The one who is proud and self-sufficient vs. the humble and destitute
- One put Christ on trial, the other saw herself unable to stand trial
- The spiritual hypocrisy is stunning
- The great love and devotion is admirable
- And the characters in this narrative are memorable

Body

The Setting: vs 36

Vs 36 Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him. And He entered the Pharisee's house, and reclined *at the table*

Jesus in His earthly ministry would minister through 4 Passovers.

- His first Passover was AD 27
- His last Passover was AD 30

This account comes in the year of AD 28-29 – just before the third Passover – at the half way point of His earthly ministry

“As the story opens, one of the Pharisees was requesting the Lord to dine with him. Where this incident took place is not known, except that it was in Galilee during Jesus' Galilean ministry, which Luke describes in 4:14-9:50.” JFM pg 171

In this account Luke gives us an insight into the posture the Pharisees had towards Christ at this time

Here Luke sets the setting for this account

- Jesus had been invited to a meal by “One of the Pharisees”
 - A Pharisee being a religious leader. A more conservative sect of religious leaders
- Jesus had dined at a wedding feast (John 2)
- He had dined with His disciples and Peter's mother-in-law (Matt 8:15)
- He dined with sinners and tax collectors (Matt 9:10-13)
- He ate with His disciples
- He also fed large crowds (John 6)

As the scriptures record Jesus visited all people

- He was not exclusive
 - He went by invitation to Matthew's Party which was for tax gatherers and sinners
 - And he is here at this event in a Pharisees home
- He openly sought to meet with all people

Here He is invited by a Pharisee to eat with Him

- Luke records in verse 40, 44 that the Pharisees name was Simon
- Jesus called Simon by his name
- Simon was a very common name

The Posture of the people around the table demonstrates this is a special meal

- Perhaps this Pharisee wanted a firsthand account of interaction with Jesus
- Jesus was one of many guests invited to this meal. This was obvious by their response in verse 49 as they marveled at His forgiving sins
 - Simon was not alone in his curiosity of this man Jesus
- Maybe the whole table was interested in what He was going to say

Clearly Simon was watching and evaluating Jesus

- He was questioning and doubting as the story will unfold
- Simon doubted Christ and His work and he was simply gathering proof to vindicate his doubts

Jesus was not a welcome guest to this dinner

- He may have been the honored guest but He was not the welcome guest
- As we will see

One more note of the setting:

- It is likely that this was a formal dinner invite
- When Rabbis would be invited over you would have the table setup for the Rabbi, the host, and the other guests
- In these special occasions, the doors to the house would be open and people would be allowed to sit around the outside of the table to listen to the conversation
- They would get the left overs if they got fed at all
- A generous host may have something to sooth them but most importantly they are present to hear the conversation and gain wisdom and insight from the Rabbi
- This is likely how the woman in this story entered the room
- She would have been allowed access
- It would be expected that as an observer and not a formal guest she would stay out of the way and out of the picture
- The observers would not enter the conversation
- To put it in the modern vernacular “they would be seen and not heard”

This accounts for her entrance into the Pharisees house

- There is no need to assume anything in appropriate between Simon the Pharisee and the woman
- She was free to come in and observe and overhear the conversation as was anyone else
- There is no telling how great of a crowd gathered but it would not be unusual to expect at least a couple of the disciples as well as a few of Simon’s friends

Kent Hughes:

“We do not know exactly why Simon the Pharisee invited Jesus to dine in his home. Perhaps because Jesus had preached in the synagogue, and it was considered a meritorious act to invite traveling rabbis to a Sabbath meal. No doubt Simon also had other reasons. Perhaps he was curious. Maybe he liked to boast about the celebrities he knew. It is even possible that he had some spiritual interest, because in Jesus’ time there were small study groups called *haberim* that held common meals for the purpose of religious study.

Whatever the reason for Simon’s inviting Jesus to dine with him, they were overlaid with a nasty animosity, for Simon purposely omitted the common courtesies accorded any honored dinner guest. Normally the host placed his hand on the guest’s shoulder and give him the kiss of peace. But this was not done for Jesus. Customarily a guest’s sandals were removed and his feet were washed when he entered or while he reclined at the table, thus removing the dust from the streets and refreshing him. Jesus’ feet were left embarrassingly dirty. Dinner guests were also anointed with a touch of olive oil. But there was no such kindness for Jesus.” Kent Hughes Page 284-285

So imagine a table filled with food, with a group of men laying on their sides around this table talking

- Outside of this group would be quiet, listening, observers frantically trying to ease drop into the conversation

This is the setting

The Event

Vs 37-38

“And behold, there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining *at the table* in the Pharisee’s house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume,³⁸ 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.”

The woman heard news that Jesus was reclining in the Pharisee’s house

- News about the occasion was spreading
- This is another indicator that this was an important event

Luke describes the woman as a sinner

- This could mean a lot of things
- The predominate opinion is that this woman was a prostitute
- But she could be an adulteress
- She could have been an evil and angry person
- There is nothing to indicate the particular type of sin other than to say she was notorious in her sin
- She is known in the city as a sinner
- Simply, she was a notorious sinner

Simon says the same about the woman in verse 39 indicating that she is a sinner and wondering to himself how Jesus did not realize this

There is a touch of Irony here:

“Ironically, Jesus demonstrated His power to forgive sins and transform lives by using the very type of person the Pharisees despised the most. In reality, the self-righteous, hypocritical religious leaders were the worst possible sinners; people who believe they are not lost and think they do not need redemption cannot be saved.” JFM pg 171

Now Jesus is reclined at the table

- He would be on His side
- Likely propped up by a pillow
- His legs and feet would be extended off to His side
- If He was right handed He would be resting on His left side

The text says this woman came up from behind Christ near His feet

- A bold sinner now living as a bold convert!

She was holding in her hand an “Alabaster vial of perfume”

- This vial of perfume would likely be made of marble
- It would have a long neck, to keep the contents from coming out too quickly
- It would likely be very expensive
- This might be another indicator that this woman’s trade was immoral
- Prostitutes would use expensive perfume to attract attention

“Not only was perfume part of the trade of being a prostitute, it was also widely used by women in general. That the vial in which the perfume was stored was made from alabaster, an expensive kind of marble quarried in Egypt, indicates that the perfume was valuable.” JFM pg 172

But based on her other actions this was an act of great love and appreciation

- A personal and costly sacrifice on the part of the woman
- A deep and reverential act of service
- A lowly and costly act of love and devotion
- A penitent expression of gratitude with no regard for financial cost or dignity

She was weeping bitterly at His feet

- Obviously she was making a scene
- The tears were streaming down her face
- They were dripping off her face and landing on the feet of Christ
- She noticed this, and likely ashamed she sought to wipe the tear drops from His feet

To wipe the feet of Christ with her hair she would need to let down her hair

- This was not to be done in public and again would have been taken as an offensive act by the Pharisees
- She was humbled and brought low before Christ

“This was socially unacceptable, because a woman was to loosen her hair only in the presence of her husband. The *Talmud* says that a woman could be divorced for letting down her hair in the

presence of another man. So grave was the offense that the rabbis put a woman's loosening her hair and uncovering her [chest] in the same category. The guests and the onlookers were in intense shock." Kent Hughes Page 285

She was in hysteria over the weight of her sin and the hope that was found in Christ

Now mind you what is happening here

- Assume for a moment that this woman was practicing the trade of harlotry
- Assume that she was immoral
- The religion of the Pharisees gave her no hope of repentance and restoration to God
- She was rejected as her sin would tempt others so she was offered no hope of restoration
- Contrast the religion of the Pharisees with the message of Christ. "Come unto me all you who are burdened and heavy laden and I will give you rest, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matt 11:30)
- In Christ there is hope that her past would be covered
- In Christ there is hope of finding peace with God
- In Christ there is a chance of redemption
- With the Pharisees there is only judgement, condemnation, ridicule, and scorn

Here the woman walks into the room, sees the Christ, knows the depth of her sin, and faces an avalanche of emotion as she is standing over His feet

- The tears falling from her cheeks hit the feet of Christ
- In the midst of this good crying she is aware of the salty tears upon His feet so she kneels and starts wiping them

The scene would be striking

- A sniveling woman hunched over the feet of Christ with her hair extended down she starts to wipe his feet clean

If this was not enough of a scene she then started to kiss His feet

- This is a bizarre scene
- If it was happening right now it would be uncomfortable for all of us
- It would be awkward for any observer

"After finishing washing them, the woman began kissing Jesus' feet. *Kataphileo* (kissing) is an intense word. In Luke 15:20 it describes the father's kissing of the prodigal son on his return home. Luke used it in Acts 20:37 to describe how the elders of the church at Ephesus kissed Paul when he took his leave of them." JFM pg 173

What started as a response of genuine brokenness, lead to a response of generous consideration (not wanting to leave her tears on His feet she cleansed them with her hair), which in turn led to an out pouring of love and affection, and finally adoration

I think it is clear the intention of the woman was to come and express adoration towards Christ

- The coming with the Alabaster of Perfume was premeditated the rest was likely the overwhelming emotional response to the significance of Christ and the freedom from sin that He freely gave

A premeditated act of adoration was fostered and strengthened by a brokenness over sin and a loving affection for a Savior

As vs 38 says she anointed His feet with perfume

- This was the planned event

There is no way she would have known His feet were not washed

There is no way she would have known that Jesus would not have been shown the basic customs

She was coming to do more and the moment overwhelmed her

This is the event – A Striking Display of Loyal Love

Simon the Pharisees Response:

³⁹ 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."

Admittedly this would be a rather disturbing scene

- It would simply be uncomfortable for any of us
- This is a good reason why our wisdom must not be the guide but rather God's wisdom must guide us

But Simon the Pharisee turns the situation on Christ

- He sees this as proof that He is not a great man
- Everyone knows that this woman is a sinner
- Her reputation in the city is that she is a sinner
- He, Jesus, is to be a prophet

The people consider Him a prophet from God

- Christ was supposed to be a mighty man of God
- After all he was at this dinner to evaluate this very issue
- This is the prophet, then He should know who this woman is

The awkward actions of the woman are ignored by Simon and instead the character of Christ is called into question

- How could Jesus not know who this woman is?
- Even if He is not from here, He is a prophet and should know who she is

Clearly the thoughts of Simon betray him

- He doubts Jesus is from God

Christ's Response to Simon 40-43

⁴⁰ And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he replied, "Say it, Teacher." ⁴¹ "A certain moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² "When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. Which of them therefore will love him more?" ⁴³ Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have judged correctly."

Immediately Christ demonstrates that He is the prophet Simon doubted Him of being

- He responds to Simon's thoughts
- Having read his heart and knows his struggles

He gives Simon a parable

- The Parable of a moneylender
 - This would obviously be a familiar concept to the audience as it is to us
 - The idea is a banker who has given out two loans
 - One owed 500 Denarii and the other 50 Denarii
 - As we learned last week a Denarii is one day labor
 - 500 days wages vs 50 days wages
 - Nearly two years of debt vs 2 months of debt (roughly)

Their debt was called and neither were able to pay so the banker released both parties from their debt obligations

- They were both graciously forgiven

"Fortunately for both the moneylender had mercy on them, and when they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. In addition to its use here in a business sense, (graciously forgave) *charizomai*, is used in a theological sense to describe the forgiveness that God grants believers in Christ (Rom. 8:32; Eph. 4:32; Col. 2:13; 3:13)." JFM pg 175

"So he canceled the debts of both. Sin is frequently referred to as a "debt," so this analogy in the parable would easily be understood as parallel to the forgiveness of sins (cf. Matt 6:12 with Luke 11:4). Compare also the interchange of "sinners" and "more guilty" (literally *debtors*) in 13:2, 4." Stein pg 237

The question, who would love more?

- ⁴³ "Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have judged correctly."
- Clearly the one who was forgiven more would have reason to love more

Simon rightly assessed the point of Christ's parable

The Scene Explained vs 44-46

"And 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 she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. ⁴⁶ "You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume."

Again, turn your attention back to the woman

- The scene she was making would be striking and out of place
- It would leave the audience uneasy
- Here is a known sinner kissing the feet of Jesus

But the scene of the woman only acts as a contrast to the indifference of Simon

- The woman's great love only exposes the indifference of Simon
- As wildly affectionate the woman was because of her gratitude, Simon was equally unmoved because of his unbelief

Vs 44

⁴⁴ "And 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."

- Jesus confronts Simon with the basic custom
- You did not wash my feet when I came in but she did with her tears and wiped my feet with her hair
- Christ was given no care, no attention, no love, not even common courtesy by Simon
- Contrast this with the exuberant love and care from the woman

Vs 45

⁴⁵ "You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet."

- Simon did not even greet Christ with a holy kiss
- A customary kiss on the cheek
- A general greeting of honor and appreciation
- Every culture has different customs for greetings
 - Americans don't kiss
 - We are too macho for that I guess
- In Africa, men hold hands while walking down the street
 - Strange to us but natural and normal
- In South America, this practice of greeting with a kiss on the cheek is normal

When the guest would arrive, there would be an acknowledgement of his arrival and appreciation for his showing up. This would be demonstrated in the kiss on the cheek

- No such expression of honor for Christ

It would be like inviting someone to your house and not giving him a handshake as he arrived

It would be like not saying hello to someone you invited to your house

Contrast Simon's indifferent with the lavish love of the woman towards Christ

Vs 46

⁴⁶ "You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume."

- Simon did not go above and beyond and provide oil for the head of Christ
- But the woman bathed His feet with perfume
- The scent of this perfume would have filled the room
- Everyone would have been aware of the honor given Him

Complete indifference vs lavish love

- The indifferent assume they love because of what they do not do or because of their external expressions
- Those who love demonstrate their love by what they do from the heart
- The indifferent inwardly are cold and judgmental
- The loving are selfless and sacrificial

The Heart Exposed vs 47-50

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." ⁴⁸ And He said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven." ⁴⁹ And those who were reclining *at the table* with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this *man* who even forgives sins?" ⁵⁰ And He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Why did the woman love so much?

- Because she has been forgiven so much
- Her extravagant and selfless response was a result of her having been forgiven great sins

Now what is interesting is Christ's words to the woman

- The woman came to Christ looking for deliverance
- She came looking for hope
- Notice what Christ said "Your sins have been forgiven" past tense
- They have already been forgiven

The woman's hysterical crying did not grant her forgiveness

The woman's humble foot washing did not grant her forgiveness

The woman's sacrificial adoration did not earn her forgiveness

Where did her forgiveness come from?

- She believed upon Christ and had forgiveness from God vs 50
- The faith, which caused her to seek, demonstrated she had forgiveness
- The faith that caused her to weep over her great debt demonstrated that she had forgiveness
- The faith that caused her to fix any inconvenience she brought to Christ demonstrated that she was forgiven
- The faith that adored and honored Christ was a proof that her sins were forgiven

This woman was forgiven and the response was overwhelming love for God

The Doubts

⁴⁹“And those who were reclining *at the table* with Him began to say to themselves, “Who is this *man* who even forgives sins?”

- This cannot be the prophet because he does not know who this woman is
- Who is this guy who can forgive sins?

Clearly Jesus demonstrates that He can forgive sins

- But in this case he demonstrates not that he has forgiven sin but that He knows that the woman’s sins are forgiven
- He knows those who belong to God
- Most clearly, He is the perfect source of forgiveness
 - We know this
 - Since he is the lamb who takes away the sin of the world
 - Since in him is the perfect satisfaction for our sins
 - “I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.” (1 John 2:12 NAS)

Conclusion

A cold and loveless Christian, if there can be any such thing, betrays a heart which does not know the depths of his sin and does not affectionately adore Christ

- The self-righteous Pharisee cannot love Christ affectionately and they betray a heart that does not know God’s forgiveness

Do you have a great love for God?

Is your love cold? Is it because your view of your sin is too low?

Is your love cold? Is it because your view of forgiveness is too shallow?

Is your love cold? Is it because you have no need of forgiveness?

Is your love cold? Is it because you stand as Christ’s judge rather than coming under Christ?

Forgiveness is the full and lavish release of debts

Very important words by JC Ryle

“The fear of punishment, the desire of reward, the sense of duty, are all useful arguments, in their ways, to persuade men to holiness. But they are all weak and powerless, until a man love Christ. Once let that mighty principle get hold of a man, and you will see his whole life changed.” Pg 237

- Listen we can say it like this, until you know the full forgiveness of Christ which manifests a great love for Christ, you will not have the power of God to live a transformed life
- The one who loves greatly lives greatly. The hidden root of this great love is forgiveness
- When you know you have been forgiven an impossible debt you can only respond with an unconquerable love

“The secret of being holy ourselves, is to know and feel that Christ has pardoned our sins. Peace with God is the only root that will bear the fruit of holiness. Forgiveness must go before sanctification.” Pg 238

Kent Hughes pg 286-87

“I would be embarrassed if I saw such a display. Yet, though it was clearly passionate, it was not erotic. It was a beautiful and fully proper outpouring of love by a redeemed soul. Slaves were assigned to attend the feet of others, but she washed his feet at her own command. It was an act of desperately joyous humility.

Consider her tears. This woman had been living with intense guilt. Having broken the seventh commandment, she was guilty, and her culture let her know it wherever she went. But not her guilt was gone – and the crushing burden had been lifted from her shoulders! So she wept.

Consider her hair. It was her womanly glory, but she loosed it to wipe the Savior’s feet. Her comeliness was devoted to Jesus’ glory. She was his servant, and his glory was her first priority.

Consider her kisses. They were acts of pure adoration. Here was a sinner’s expression like the heart of the Virgin Mary – “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he was looked on the humble estate of his servant” (1:46-48).

Consider Jesus Christ! He was not put off by the woman’s fleshly sins. When she came to him, she sensed nothing of the judgmentalism of the self-righteous. Jesus did not have the conventional moralism that condemns *outward* sins while ignoring *inward* sins. Jesus freely received and redeemed her as she came to him in faith and repentance.”

Do you love the Lord and His people greatly? If not, you need to test yourself to see if you know the forgiveness of God

Paradigm Principle #5

5. The one who has received forgiveness responds in affectionate appreciation

Sometimes we treat our sin cheaply so when we are forgiven we value it little. Oh we miss the great love of God and for God when we have such a low view of our own sin

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