

Rediscover Jesus

Part 19: Jesus, a Pharisee, and a Sinful Woman | Luke 7:36-50

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Personal Introduction

Hi everyone. If you don't know me, my name is Eric and I'm a pastor at HMCC of Jakarta, and it's my privilege to preach the Word of God to us today.

Sermon Series Introduction

We're currently in Part 19 of our sermon series called "Rediscover Jesus," where we're studying the Gospel account of Luke from chapters 4-9, which record Jesus' public ministry in the area of Galilee.

So let's get right into today's sermon: "Jesus, a Pharisee, and a Sinful Woman."

Sermon Introduction

Imagine for a moment that you are poor and have no social capital. You don't have many resources and you don't have people around you to help you. And let's say someone comes along and says, "Let me buy you a meal." How thankful would you be?

Now let's say that person says, "Let me buy you an iPhone and I'll make sure you have a Telkomsel package that's refilled every month. Call me anytime if you need anything." How thankful would you be now?

Now let's say that person says, "Let me buy you a car, I'll teach you how to drive, I'll help you get a driver's license, I'll pay for your car insurance and all the gas you need." How thankful would you be now?

Now let's say that person says, "Let me help you get into a good school and I'll pay for your entire education—whatever you need. Grade school, university, graduate school, doctorate degrees. Whatever education you want, I got you covered." How thankful would you be now?

We could keep going with this, but my guess is that we would be *somewhat* thankful for the meal that we couldn't afford, *very* thankful for the iPhone that we couldn't afford, *extremely* thankful for the car we couldn't afford, and *completely overwhelmed* with thankfulness for the education that we could never afford.

But that actually all depends on the starting point. I asked us to imagine that we were poor and had no social capital. But let's say you *think* you're rich and you have an established social network. How thankful would you be for the meal, the iPhone, the car, and the education?

If we have *nothing* and are given *everything*, it makes total sense that we would express great love and appreciation to the one who graciously gave us everything we have. We might shout, we might cry, we might give the person the biggest hug, we might tell everyone how great of a person he is. We would do everything we could possibly do to let them know how grateful we are for what they have done. They've completely transformed our lives.

But if we *think* we have everything and are given *add-ons*, it wouldn't make any sense why we would respond in any kind of over-the-top manner. We might even refuse their gracious offers because we don't think we need any of them. After all, we have ourselves covered.

<pause>

In a way, that's the difference between how different people respond to Jesus.

When we see how spiritually poor we are and how *great* is our sin, and Jesus comes along and forgives us *all* of our sins and gives us access to *all* his resources, our *whole* lives are transformed and we cannot help but to express *great* love and appreciation to him. That's the *only* response that makes sense.

But when we *don't* see how spiritually poor we are and we *don't* think our sins are that great, and Jesus comes along and offers to forgive us all our sins and give us access to all his resources, we won't be that interested, we won't be that thankful, and we won't express great love towards him. After all, we didn't *think* we needed him much to begin with.

That's the contrast of responses that we're going to see in today's passage.

The One Thing

***When we realize our great sin Jesus has forgiven,
we will respond with great love to him who has given.***

Scripture Introduction

Turn your Bibles to Luke 7:36-50.

Just want to give a bit of context before jumping into today's passage.

Last week, we saw that Jesus was speaking to the crowds concerning John the Baptist, who was the forerunner for the coming of Christ. And the writer Luke gave a narrative aside explaining how the different people responded to Jesus.

Some responded *positively*, having *repented* of their sins through John's baptism for the forgiveness of sins, but the Pharisees and the lawyers responded *negatively*, having *refused* to repent of their sins through John's baptism for the forgiveness of sins. And so, Luke says that the Pharisees and the lawyers who refused to repent had "rejected the purpose of God for themselves."

And that's where we are in today's passage.

Scripture Reading

So let's read Luke 7:36-50.

³⁶ One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. ³⁷ And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, ³⁸ and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. ³⁹ Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." ⁴⁰ And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon [**that is, Simon the Pharisee**], 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.”

This is God’s Word.

If you’ve read the other Gospel accounts, this narrative may sound somewhat familiar because they all have a narrative of a woman who anoints Jesus. However, to be clear, this passage here in Luke is *different* from the passages found in Matthew, Mark, and John (Matt. 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8).

- In the other passages, the anointing occurs in *Judea* in Jesus’ *last* week before his crucifixion, the host is a *leper*, the woman is *not* identified as a sinner, she pours the perfume on Jesus’ *head*, and the controversy centers on the *cost* of the perfume.
- But in the narrative here in Luke, the anointing occurs in *Galilee* much *earlier* in Jesus’ ministry, the host is a *Pharisee*,¹ the woman *is* identified as a sinner, she pours the perfume on Jesus’ *feet*, and the controversy centers on the *character* of the woman.²

So this is a different narrative than similar sounding ones in the other Gospel accounts.

Overview

We’ll look at this passage in two parts:

- I. A sinful woman anoints Jesus (vv. 36-40)
- II. A Pharisee is admonished by Jesus (vv. 41-50)

... where to “admonish,” in this context, is to express warning or disapproval (Merriam-Webster).

I. A sinful woman anoints Jesus (vv. 36-40)

Verses 36-38 say this:

³⁶ One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee’s house and reclined at table. ³⁷ And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, ³⁸ and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.

So one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to a banquet held at his house.³ *Previously*, Jesus was criticized by Pharisees for eating with tax collectors and sinners (Luke 5:30; 7:34), but *now* a Pharisee invites Jesus to eat with him.

We’re not *exactly* sure what prompted this Pharisee to invite Jesus, but Jesus took him up on the invitation.

Jesus doesn’t show any partiality. He had no problems eating with tax collectors *or* Pharisees.⁴ He was a friend of *sinners* (Luke 7:34)—whether *self-indulgent* sinners or *self-righteous* sinners (cf. Luke 18:9-14).

For Jesus to be “*reclining* at table in the Pharisee’s house” was the typical posture for men at a banquet.

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¹ David L. Jeffrey (*Luke*, BTCB [Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2012], 112) notes that lepers were ineligible to be Pharisees.

² Walter L. Liefeld and David W. Pao, *Luke*, rev. ed., EBC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009).

³ James R. Edwards (*The Gospel According to Luke*, PNTC [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015]) writes: “Jewish feasts were governed by a litany of complex and obligatory protocols. They included invitations delivered to guests by slaves or servants (feasts were normally scheduled in late afternoons); preparation of proper foods; proper reception of guests, serving of hors d’oeuvres, inviting of guests into the dining room, and seating them in order of age and importance; provision of washbasins and wine, and prayers before meals and various times during it; and lighting of incense candles after the meal, followed by more wine and sweets.”

⁴ Leon L. Morris, *Luke*, TNTC (Nottingham, England: IVP, 2008).



During the meal, the invited guests wouldn't have been sitting on chairs, but they would have been *reclining* on their left elbows and eating with their right hands, and their feet would have extended away from the table.⁵

In the first-century Jewish world, uninvited guests were permitted at banquets as long as they remained along the walls.⁶ As the invited guests ate and conversed at the table, uninvited townspeople were free to enter to observe the conversation.⁷

[³⁶ One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. ³⁷ And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, ³⁸ and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.]

And in verse 37, Luke grabs our attention by saying, “And *behold*,” and then he introduces a new character to the scene: “a woman of the city, who was a sinner.” Many older and modern commentators think that this woman is a *prostitute*,⁸ which may or may not be the case—all that is stated is that she was from that city and that she was known to be a “sinner.” She could've been a prostitute, a drunkard, an unjust merchant, a colluder with the oppressive Roman government, or something else. We're not *exactly* told, but we know that everyone else in the city *recognizes* her as a notorious “sinner” (cf. Luke 7:39).

And when the sinful woman learned that Jesus was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster flask of ointment (or perfume) and went there. Perhaps she got there before Jesus or maybe she arrived at the same time (cf. Luke 7:45), but as soon as Jesus reclined at the table, she walks up behind him at his feet. And as she's standing behind Jesus, she's *overwhelmed* with emotion and she just begins to *weep*.

This was *not* planned. Nobody *plans* to weep, but this was spontaneous. And as she's standing behind him weeping, her tears are beginning to drop on his feet and it says that “she began to *wet* his feet with her tears.” I don't think anyone would really consider one or two tear drops “wetting” his feet. In her uncontrollable weeping, she must have been *soaking* his feet in her tears.

And of course, since she didn't *plan* to weep, she didn't *plan* to wet his feet with her tears, and so she didn't bring a towel. And so, she does what was socially *unthinkable*; she *loosens* her long hair, she gets on her knees, and she begins to wipe her tears from his feet with her hair. It was generally socially *unacceptable* for a woman to loosen her hair in public because it was associated with *intimacy* and only

⁵ R. T. France, *Luke*, TTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 135.

⁶ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015).

⁷ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke*, rev. ed., PTW (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013). Joel B. Green (*The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997]) writes: “Luke has often cast his meal scenes in the form of Greco-Roman *symposia*, wherein conversation, perhaps even lively debate, follows the meal itself. Within the topos of the *symposium* a certain decorum was expected; hence, for example, apropos 7:36–50, philosophical conflict might be expected in the “talking party” following the meal, even to the extent that the chief guest would best his host, but this would (and should) not involve a breach of the basic rules of hospitality.”

⁸ Mikeal C. Parsons, *Luke*, PCNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2015), 128.

meant to be done in the presence of her husband.⁹ All the guests—invited or uninvited—would have been completely *shocked* by this.

And to add to this, we'll find out later that the Pharisee who invited Jesus didn't give him any water to wash his feet upon entering his house (Luke 7:44), so Jesus' feet would have been covered in dust and dirt. So as you can imagine, it's all getting mixed with her tears and her hair is getting all covered and tangled in *mud*. And then she kisses his feet, which in the original Greek means "to kiss again and again."¹⁰

So there's mud in her *hair* and probably mud on her *face*. And she's probably still weeping with tears and snot running down her face. And as with all weeping, it's not silent. At the very least, she's sniffing, if not hyperventilating or making other sobbing sounds.

And then she finally does what she first *intended* to do in bringing the alabaster flask of perfume with her: she *anoints* Jesus' feet with it. We're *not* told how she obtained this valuable alabaster flask, but we know that it would have been *expensive*.¹¹

Now all this would have taken *time*.¹² She *stood* behind Jesus, she *wept*, she *began to wet* his feet with her tears, she *loosened* her hair, she *got* on her knees, she *wiped* his feet with her hair, she *repeatedly kissed* his feet, and she *anointed* him with the perfume.

<pause>

Now we have to ask: *What* would drive this *woman* to do this for Jesus?

Or perhaps more importantly: What did *Jesus* do that would *cause* this woman to respond in this kind of over-the-top way to him?

Did Jesus just buy her a meal? Did he just say hi to her when nobody else would? Did Jesus just preach a good sermon?

Well, if *I* preached a good sermon, would any of *you* ever respond this way to me? Probably not.

Ask yourself: *What* would someone have to do for you in order for you to respond in this kind of extravagant way to him?

Luke doesn't tell us right away, but he leaves us with that lingering question as the narrative goes on.

<pause>

So far, nobody has said anything. No doubt that all the conversation probably stopped as this was happening. Everyone is left *speechless*. Everyone is left *uncomfortable*.

I'm sure everyone was thinking all kinds of thoughts, but nobody was *voicing out* their thoughts. But then we get a *glimpse* into the mind of the Pharisee.

Verses 39-40 say this:

³⁹ Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she

⁹ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke*, rev. ed., PTW (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013). See also David L. Jeffrey, *Luke*, BTCB (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2012), 112; and Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997). Mikeal C. Parsons (*Luke*, PCNT [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2015], 129) writes: "One exception to this general rule, however, was grieving rituals in which it was acceptable for a woman, regardless of age or marital status, to 'let down her hair in public without risking censure.'"

¹⁰ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke*, rev. ed., PTW (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

¹¹ James R. Edwards (*The Gospel According to Luke*, PNTC [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015]) gives a couple options: "The expensive alabaster jar of perfume is attributed to her opprobrious professional success" or "A woman's possession of a valuable alabaster jar of perfume could easily (and better) be explained as an inheritance."

¹² David L. Jeffrey, *Luke*, BTCB (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2012), 113.

is a sinner.”⁴⁰ And Jesus answering said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” And he answered, “Say it, Teacher.”

So when the Pharisee who invited Jesus saw this sinful woman doing this extravagant act for him, he begins to make some conclusions.

- First, “This woman is a *sinner*.”
- Second, “Jesus *doesn’t* know that this woman is a sinner.”
- Third, “A prophet *should* know that this woman is a sinner.”
- And so, his big conclusion is, “Therefore, Jesus is *not* a prophet.”

It’s interesting that this Pharisee *doesn’t* wonder about the questions that we were just asking before. He’s *not* asking, “*What* would drive this woman to do this for Jesus?” or “*What* did Jesus do that would cause this woman to respond in this kind of over-the-top way to him?”

Perhaps he already *assumed* that *surely* this sinful woman is just sinning right now. She’s acting in a disgraceful manner in public. And *surely* Jesus is *somehow* sinning by receiving the disgraceful acts of this sinful woman.

For whatever reason, this Pharisee is *not* asking the questions that we were asking. In fact, he’s *not* asking *questions* at all, but he’s making *conclusions*.

<pause>

For us, if someone were to examine your thoughts, would they hear more *questions* or more *conclusions*? My guess is that we’re probably quick to jump to conclusions before we ask enough questions to *really* understand.

When someone is sharing with you, have you already diagnosed their problem in your mind and already coming up with potential solutions to share with them?

When someone makes a mistake, are you already making conclusions about *why* they made that mistake and then beginning to judge them based on your unfounded conclusions about them?

I think we would all do well to ask more *questions* to genuinely try to understand before jumping to conclusions.

None of us likes it when others *assume* that they know what we’re going through *without* really taking the time to ask us questions to better understand.

None of us likes it when others start giving *unsolicited counsel* on what we should do next to solve an issue that isn’t even accurate to what we’re going through.

None of us likes it when others begin making *uncharitable judgments* about us when they’ve never taken the time to ask us face-to-face about what we were thinking to allow us to clarify.

And yet, we do those *very same* things to others. Like this Pharisee, we don’t ask questions, but we jump to conclusions and then make *further* conclusions based on our *unfounded* conclusions.

<pause>

But notice that the Pharisee didn’t *voice out* his thoughts, but “he said to *himself*.” Nonetheless, Jesus “answers” him. The Pharisee wasn’t talking to *Jesus*; he was just thinking to *himself*, but Jesus *answers* his private thoughts.

The irony is that, by hearing and responding to the Pharisee’s private thoughts, Jesus was demonstrating that he is *indeed* a prophet (cf. 2 Kings 6:12). But even *more* than a prophet, he is the Word of God himself that discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart (John 1:14 Heb. 4:12).

Now Jesus is the *first* person in this entire narrative to *speak aloud* and the person he chooses to address is *Simon* the Pharisee.

And this comes as a bit of a surprise. Given everything that has just happened to him, wouldn't Jesus have something to say to the *woman* at his feet?

Even though nobody has spoken until now, Jesus knows that there has been constant chatter in the minds of all the guests. They *all* know that this woman is a sinner. And I'm sure this whole ordeal just provided more ammunition for their judgmental thoughts of her.

And not just criticisms against the *woman*, but from the glimpse into Simon's thoughts, I'm sure everyone was beginning to judge *Jesus* for receiving this act from this notoriously sinful woman.

Jesus will *later* speak to the woman, but he *first* chooses to speak to Simon the Pharisee, and perhaps by implication, everyone else in the room who thought like him.

So Jesus says, "Simon, I have something to say to you."

Perhaps Simon is a bit taken aback that Jesus has something to say to *him* rather than the *woman*. He doesn't ask, "What is it?" like we might ask, but he responds, "Say it, Teacher." It's not exactly rude but it's also not very inviting.¹³

<pause>

So first, a sinful woman anoints Jesus, and second...

II. A Pharisee is admonished by Jesus (vv. 41-50)

Verses 41-43 say this:

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."

Jesus begins to tell Simon the Pharisee a brief parable, where two people owed a moneylender large amounts that both of them could not pay. A denarius was a day's wage for a laborer (cf. Matt. 20:2), so one person owed 500 days' (or about 20 months') wages and the other person owed 50 days' (or about two months') wages.

Given that the average wages were barely enough for survival,¹⁴ these were *overwhelming* debts that Jesus makes clear that "they could *not* pay." Even though one person's debts were 10 times the amount of the other person's debts, it didn't matter; they both could *not* pay—and so, they were essentially in the *same* hopeless predicament.

And the moneylender, seeing that *neither* could pay their debts, "he cancelled the debt of *both*." And then Jesus asks Simon a question, "Now which of them will *love* him more?"

The interesting thing about this question is that Jesus *assumes* that *both* debtors who had their debts cancelled *will love* the moneylender. It's *not* that the person who had the *greater* debt cancelled will *love* the moneylender and the person who had the *lesser* debt cancelled will *hate* or *reject* or *disregard* him. No, Jesus *assumes* that *both* will *love* him for cancelling their unpayable debts.

Now *debt* was a common way to talk about *sin* (cf. Matt. 18:21-35). That's why, in the Lord's Prayer, we're taught to pray, "and forgive us our *debts*, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt. 6:12).

¹³ Leon L. Morris, *Luke*, TNTC (Nottingham, England: IVP, 2008).

¹⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke*, rev. ed., PTW (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

So as Simon is beginning to grasp what Jesus is saying about his overwhelming sins that need to be forgiven, he answers Jesus a bit reluctantly, “The one, *I suppose*, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.”

So what’s the implication of this parable?

You might *think* that the implication is that *Jesus* is the moneylender, the *sinful woman* is the one with the *greater* debt, and *Simon* is the one with *lesser* debt.

But that’s *not* quite right. Remember, although the one who had the greater debt cancelled may have loved the moneylender *more*, it’s *assumed* that *both* people who had their debts cancelled *loved* the moneylender because they *both* knew that they could *never* pay back their debts.

So in the parable, if Simon were the one with *lesser* debt, then he *should* have responded by *loving* the one who had cancelled his debt. But as we’ll soon find out, Simon did *not* show much love towards Jesus, and so it evidenced that he was *not yet* forgiven of his sins.

This was a *subtle* admonishment from Jesus. And Simon gets the point, even if he’s reluctant to admit it. And so, Jesus affirms that Simon has “judged rightly.”

Even though Simon may not *like* it, he at least *understands* the point of the parable. But Jesus doesn’t just want him to *understand* it *conceptually*, so he then begins to *apply* it to him more *personally* in a *not-so-subtle* way.

Verses 44-47 say this:

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.”

Jesus now *dramatically* turns toward the *woman*, but he’s *still* speaking to *Simon*. Jesus asks Simon, “Do you *see* this woman?” Both Jesus and Simon are *looking* at the woman, but they’re each *seeing* someone different.

Simon saw who she *once was*, but Jesus saw who she *now is*. Simon saw a *sinful* woman, but Jesus saw a *forgiven* woman. Simon saw a woman whose debts were *great*, but Jesus saw a woman whose debts were *cancelled*.

<pause>

The way we *see* a person and the way we interpret what they *do* has everything to do with who we think they *are*.

For *Simon*, this woman was a *sinner*, so he saw a *sinful* woman, and he interpreted all her over-the-top actions as *sinful* and *disgraceful*.

But for *Jesus*, this woman was now a *daughter of God*, so he saw a *forgiven* woman, and he interpreted her over-the-top actions as *loving* and *beautiful*.

But Simon’s problem wasn’t *just* how he viewed the *woman*, but also how he viewed *himself*. This is the way that Jesus characterized a Pharisee in another one of his parables in...

Luke 18:11-12 = 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. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’

Like the stereotypical Pharisee, Simon saw himself as a *righteous* person and so he interpreted all his actions as *righteous* acts.

And so, Jesus begins to shatter and completely turn upside down how Simon sees the *woman* and how he sees *himself*.

[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.”]

Simon had invited Jesus as an honored guest to eat with him, but he didn’t treat him that way *at all*. In the ancient world, when a host invited a guest to their home for a meal, there were certain customs that were expected of the host.

- Usually, when an honored guest arrived, the host would provide water to wash his dusty, dirty feet after he removed his sandals (cf. Gen. 18:4; Judg. 19:21).
- The host would also put his hand on the guest’s shoulder and exchange a kiss on the cheek on each side of his head (cf. Gen. 29:13; 45:15).
- And the host would anoint the guest’s head with olive oil to refresh them after being in the hot sun and dusty streets (cf. Ps. 23:5; 141:5).¹⁵

But as a rather *impolite* and *unloving* host, Simon did *not* offer these common courtesies to Jesus as his honored guest. But what Simon *failed* to provide, the woman *more* than made up for.

- Rather than using *water*, she washed his feet with her *tears*.
- Rather than giving a *customary* kiss of welcome, she did not stop kissing *his feet*.
- Rather than anointing his head with *plentiful* and *cheap* olive oil, she anointed his feet with a *rare* and *expensive* perfume.¹⁶

And given the parable that Jesus just told Simon, the *reason* for their vastly *different* treatments of Jesus had to do with how they each saw *themselves* and how they each saw *Jesus*.

Simon didn’t see himself as a great sinner; he didn’t think he was in debt at all, or if he was, it wasn’t an overwhelming debt that he could not pay but something that he could manage himself.

And so, like many of the Pharisees, he *refused* to repent of his sins through John’s baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 7:30; cf. 3:3). And when John pointed to Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), Simon wasn’t impressed—and it *showed* in the way he treated Jesus as his honored guest.

In fact, look carefully at verse 47; Jesus says, “Therefore I tell you [that is, *Simon*], her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But *he* [that is, the *general person*] who is forgiven little, loves little.”

Jesus doesn’t say to Simon, “But *you* who are forgiven little, loves little,” because Simon didn’t even love him *a little*, which *revealed* that Simon wasn’t even forgiven *a little*.

In fact, when it comes to sinners before a holy God, there is no such thing as being “forgiven a little” because *none* of us are “little sinners,” “for *all* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23) and “all our righteous acts are like filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6 NIV). “*None* is righteous, no, not one” (Rom. 3:10), “for whoever keeps the whole law but fails in *one* point has become guilty of *all* of it” (James 2:10).

¹⁵ R. C. Sproul, *A Walk with God: An Exposition of Luke* (Great Britain: Christian Focus, 1999), 154. See also R. Kent Hughes, *Luke*, rev. ed., PTW (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

¹⁶ Leon L. Morris, *Luke*, TNTC (Nottingham, England: IVP, 2008).

We are either forgiven *all* of our sins or *none* of them. The difference between the person who is forgiven much or forgiven little is *not* regarding how *much* sin they are forgiven of, but rather how *conscious* or how *aware* they are of how *much* sin they have been forgiven of.

Just like the woman, Simon had an *unpayable* debt that he owed. But whereas the woman was fully *aware* of how sinful she was, Simon wasn't *conscious* of how *great* his sins were. And so, he wasn't too interested in forgiveness, and he didn't care too much for Jesus as the one who offered forgiveness.

<pause>

But for the woman, she was fully *aware* of the fact that she was a *great* sinner; she *knew* that she had an *overwhelming* debt that she could *never* pay. And so, when Jesus came along with the authority to forgive sins, she was not only *interested* but she was *desperate* for all her sins to be forgiven.

Now, look again at verse 47: "Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much."

First, Jesus *disproves* Simon's previous conclusion; Jesus knows *full well* "*who* and *what sort* of woman this is who is touching him" (Luke 7:39). He *knows* that her sins are *many*.

Second, on the surface, it seems like her many sins are forgiven *because* she loved much, as if it were her over-the-top actions that somehow *caused* her to be forgiven. But that cannot be the case. Why? Because that completely *undermines* the parable that Jesus just said. The *love* doesn't come first, but the *cancelled debts* come first and the *love* comes as an *appropriate response* towards the one who cancelled the debts.

Jesus is *not* giving an opposite conclusion to what his parable just taught. This is how verse 47 is translated in the New International Version:

Luke 7:47 (NIV) = Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown....

Her over-the-top expressions of great love towards Jesus are *evidence* for the fact that she had *already* been forgiven by Jesus.¹⁷

Not only is that clear from the parable, but *personally*, could it *really* be anything else?

Again, ask yourself: *What* would someone have to do for you in order for you to respond in this kind of extravagant way to him?

- What would make you voluntarily enter a space where everyone would be judging you?
- What would make you start spontaneously weeping so hard as you stood behind the person you wanted to express great love to, that you started soaking his feet in your tears?
- What would make you muddy your hair and your face to dry and repeatedly kiss his dirty feet?
- What would make you pour out your most valuable possession upon his feet?

I cannot reasonably think of *anything* that would ever drive me to do something so over-the-top like that *except* the forgiveness of my sins.

Nothing else can make sense of what she did for Jesus. She is a *portrait* of someone who was fully *aware* of her *great* sin and Jesus' *great* forgiveness; someone who understands the *depths* of those two truths will express *great* love towards Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

This is what God's Word says in...

Colossians 2:13-14 = And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the

¹⁷ Walter L. Liefeld and David W. Pao (Luke, rev. ed., EBC [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009]) write: "The use of ὅτι (*hoti*, "for") here is not to show causality but evidence.... The TEV has 'the great love she has shown proves that her many sins have been forgiven.'"

record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

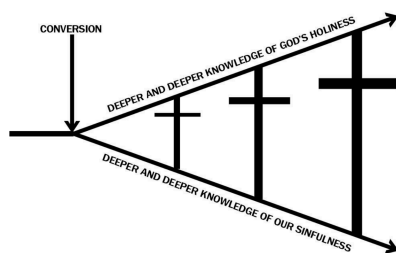
How did Jesus cancel our great debt of sins? By paying for them *himself* on the cross. “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By *his* wounds *you* have been healed” (1 Pet. 2:24).

The gospel is that though God created us, we have sinned against him and are rightly deserving of his wrath; but in his great love for us, he came as the person of Jesus Christ to live the perfect, sinless life that we could not live, die on the cross to take the penalty for sin that we deserved, and resurrected three days later so that we too would have new life. So now, anyone who would repent of their sins and believe in him alone as their Lord and Savior will be forgiven all their sins and have eternal life in him.

The moment we first believed in *that* gospel is the moment that our whole *identity* changed.

- We were *once* wretched sinners, but we are *now* beloved sons and daughters of God (Rom. 8:1-17).
- We were *once* enemies of God (Rom. 5:10), but we are *now* friends of God (John 15:15).
- We were *once* dead in our sins, but we are *now* made alive with Christ (Eph. 2:5)
- We were *once* prisoners of the domain of darkness, but we are *now* citizens of the kingdom of God’s beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:13-14).

<Show crosschart.jpeg>



The moment we first believed in the gospel was the moment of our *conversion*. And throughout the rest of our Christian life, we become progressively more *aware* of our sinfulness and God’s holiness. And even though that gap *appears* to be getting larger and larger, we rejoice in the fact that Christ has *fully paid* for all of our sins on the cross and we are *indeed* forgiven.

And it’s *not* that God is getting more holy or that we’re getting more sinful, but as we grow in our relationship with Christ, we become more and more *aware* of *how* holy he is and *how* sinful we are.

But the more we realize that, the more we realize how *great* of a debt Jesus has actually cancelled for us. And the more we realize that, the more we will express *great* love to Jesus who forgave us all our sins.

[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.”]

At this point, I think we need to ask ourselves an honest question: When I look at the great love that this woman showed Jesus, does it make sense to me?

If it makes sense to you *conceptually*, is that the kind of love that you *personally* express to Jesus for the forgiveness of *your* sins? We may not be able to express this kind of love to him in the *same* way, but is this our *heart posture* towards him, knowing that he *cancelled* all our overwhelming debts as he *hung* in our place on the cross?

If the great love that this woman showed Jesus *doesn't* make sense to you *at all*, then perhaps you have not yet realized how great is your sin and perhaps you are not yet forgiven.

I don't say that in a *condemning* way, but in a *caring* way. I don't believe Jesus told Simon the parable to condemn him but to *lovingly warn* him towards *recognizing* how great is his *sin* and to *lovingly urge* him towards *experiencing* how great is the *forgiveness* that he offers.

Verses 48-50 then say this:

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."

In verse 48 (as in verse 47), the verb tense for "are forgiven" in the original Greek is perfect, passive, indicative, meaning "have been forgiven," which indicates *prior* forgiveness.¹⁸

Again, that's the whole point of the parable that Jesus spoke. Her sins had *already* been forgiven, *and so* she loved much.

So if she had *already* been forgiven and she *already* knew it, why would Jesus say this to her? I think there's a twofold reason.

First, even though she already *knew* she was forgiven, I think it was *reassuring* for the woman to *hear* that pronouncement *again* from Jesus, "Your sins have been forgiven."

All of us may *know* that our parents love us, but there's something powerful about *hearing* it again from their own lips, "I love you, daughter. I'm proud of you, son."

Second, I also think Jesus made this pronouncement for *everyone else* in that room—for *them* to *know* that this woman's sins had been forgiven. Up to that point, they only knew and saw her as a *sinful* woman. But here, Jesus declares to her whole community that she has a *new identity*; she is now a *forgiven* woman.

And after Jesus declares to the woman, "Your sins have been forgiven," all those at the table begin to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?"

Thus far, only *Jesus* had been asking questions. But this is the *first* time that someone *other* than Jesus is asking a question. This is the *first* time that they're *not* jumping to *conclusions*, but they're pausing to consider what's going on and they're asking a *question*. And *this* is the million-dollar question: "Who is this, who even forgives sins?"

And Luke leaves us with that question to consider ourselves. Is Jesus just a teacher, a miracle worker, a prophet? Or is he *more*, for "who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Luke 5:21).

Jesus doesn't address their question here, but he keeps his focus on the *woman*. Even while talking to Simon, Jesus has been looking at *her*. I'm sure Jesus hears their question, but he has one more thing to say to the forgiven woman.

He says to her, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Jesus makes clear that it was *not* her expression of great love that saved her—that somehow merited the forgiveness of her sins. No, her *faith* has saved her. She *believed* in Jesus at his word, she *received* forgiveness of her sins, and she *expressed* great love to him. *That's* the order.

And finally, Jesus sends the woman in the *peace* of the Lord. She leaves being *reassured* that, despite her *many* sins, she is at *peace* with God. When Satan, others, or even herself try to condemn her for her sins later, "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard [her heart] and [her mind] in

¹⁸ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015).

Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7), for "there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

<pause>

As the narrative comes to a close, everyone is left wondering: So what about Simon? How did he respond to Jesus' admonishment? Did he come to realize how great is his sin, repent of his sins and believe in Jesus, receive forgiveness, and express great love towards him?

Luke doesn't tell us. Hopefully Simon would have responded like the apostle Paul, who was *also* a Pharisee and who was *once* a persecutor of the church, but after a humbling encounter with the resurrected Christ, became a Christian and one of the greatest missionaries the church has ever known. But we just don't know; Luke leaves it open-ended.

And in the same way, the narrative is left open-ended for us as well. We're left to wonder for ourselves: So what about me? How will I respond to Jesus?

I pray that many of us here today would come to realize how great is our sin, and that we would repent of them and believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins. And as we receive our new identity in Christ as *forgiven* sons and daughters of God, I pray that the only appropriate response that we can imagine is to drop at his feet to offer up our whole lives as an expression of our great love for him.

Nothing else should make sense for us to do.

The One Thing

***When we realize our great sin Jesus has forgiven,
we will respond with great love to him who has given.***

Life Application

1. How conscious are you of your great sin before God? Spend time reflecting and repenting.

If being more conscious or aware of our great sin is the doorway to experiencing Jesus' forgiveness, then it would be wise for us to set aside time to reflect on our sins and to repent of them.

I'd recommend spending just a few minutes in the evening, even if it's as you lay in bed, to reflect on your day and repent of any sinful thoughts, attitudes, desires, words, or actions—or any failure to do what you know God wanted you to do. Or if not the evening, spend a few minutes in the morning reflecting and repenting of sins from the previous day and asking for God's grace to empower you to live for him that day.

2. How thankful are you of Jesus' forgiveness? Seek out ways to express love to him.

Being more conscious of your great sin without being conscious of forgiveness in Christ would be crushing. But if we believe that Jesus has paid for all our sins on the cross as our substitute, then reflection and repentance of sin should produce great thankfulness, joy, and love for Christ.

We may not be able to do what the woman did in this passage for Jesus, but we can express our love and thanks to him in other ways. Perhaps start with just saying, "Thank you God that even though I am a wretched sinner, you have made me your son (or daughter)." Perhaps express love for Jesus by seeking to spend more time with him in the Word and prayer. Or by talking about him with others in the church. Or by speaking about him to others who don't yet know him. Or by expressing love to others made in his image (Matt. 25:35-40).

In the various contexts that he has placed us in, with our different constraints and opportunities, let's seek out ways to express great love to him who has forgiveness of all our sins by giving us himself on the

cross. As we continue to realize our great sin Jesus has forgiven, may we respond with greater love to him who has given.

Conclusion

Can we all stand as we respond to God's Word together?