

Forgiven Much, Loving Much

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Luke 7:36-50

Good morning First Presbyterian Church! It is a joy to bring the Word to you this morning. I am so thankful to serve this church! The Scripture text this morning comes to us from Luke 7:36-50, read from the English Standard Version. All of my other verse references come from the English Standard Version as well. Let us pray that the eyes of our hearts would be open to the message God has for us this morning.

Prayer for Illumination

(Pray)

I want you to imaginatively enter into this story with me, and see what kind of deep work Jesus wants to do in our hearts this morning, because Jesus is always going after the deepest parts of us, seeking our innermost transformation.

Luke 7:36-50

A Sinful Woman Forgiven

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, 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."

The Word of God for the people of God.

Thanks be to God.

Intro

I love today's passage. Today we have a classic Jesus story. One where he turns social conventions on their head and reveals what really matters in the kingdom of heaven. We see Jesus' upside down kingdom, where in Jesus' words, *many who are first will be last, and the last first. (Matthew 19:30)*

Let's do a quick recap. Jesus is invited to Simon the Pharisee's house for a meal. Let's just notice that our rabbi and Lord is always down for a good meal with company. Following him means we will love to break bread with one another and also those who are very different from us. That's another sermon, but I always love to note that.

So Jesus gets invited to Simon's. This was a very significant gesture in Jesus' day. Hospitality was a way of showing a sincere openness and some level of respect for the guests invited. So we know Simon wasn't like the other Pharisees. He was "open" to Jesus. In walks a woman of the city—considered a "sinner" in Capernaum. That she is called a sinner is significant. All people of Jesus' day knew they had sin, but to be called a "sinner" was a technical term connotating her uncleanness and lower status in society because of her likely occupation as a prostitute. She bravely comes into this dinner to express her love for Jesus. She weeps "behind Jesus' feet" because Jesus was reclining at the table with his feet away from the table as was the convention at the time. She washes his feet and pours out her alabaster jar, wiping them with her hair and lovingly kissing them.

Simon the Pharisee, now doubting if Jesus is even a prophet, thinks to himself, I guess Jesus isn't a prophet because he's letting this "sinner" perform this scandalous

act. "If he really knew who she was, he wouldn't let her do this," Simon thinks. Jesus of course doesn't just know who she is superficially, but who she is in her deepest heart just as he knew Simon. Jesus knows what Simon is thinking, so he tells a parable to show not only that he knows who the woman is, but also to show Simon who he is.

And so we are given the parable of the debtor who forgives the two different debts one equivalent to a month's wages and the other closer to a year's wages. Jesus explains that because Simon does not recognize his sin as great or perhaps even that it needs forgiving, his actions of neglectful hospitality reveal the lack of love in his heart. Conversely, the woman has realized she is forgiven completely for all she has ever done—a very significant amount in her own eyes—and therefore she has poured out all she has in humble service to Jesus.

Luke is showing us vivid contrast here - do you see it? He wants us to see how we can become transformed into lovers of Jesus, not merely religious observers. I want to make the point this morning that it is absolutely critical that we gain spiritual sight. What I mean by spiritual sight, is the ability to see clearly the spiritual realities around us. We must be utterly dependent on the Spirit to see three things, our sin, who Jesus is, and the weight of forgiveness. This sight will make us into lovers, pouring out our hearts to the lover of our souls. So here are my four points - we must see 1.) our sin, 2.) who Jesus is, and 3.) the weight of forgiveness, and this sight allows us to, 4.) become lovers of our Lord. Let's take each in kind.

Seeing Our Sin

What is Jesus showing us about our sin? Actually so much here. One question that jumps out to me is, why does Jesus use unequal debts in the parable he teaches here? I've wrestled quite a bit with this question. One thing I know for sure, is that Jesus is trying to call attention to the fact that neither debtor *could actually pay their debt*, and therefore their punishment would be the same. They would end up in prison until they could pay it, which would be never. Jesus is trying to point out that we're all in the same boat here. We cannot pay our debt. And while our sin debt may be different relative to each other, relative to God, it is far greater than any of us are aware of.

In another parable, often called the parable of the unforgiving servant, Jesus is teaching about the necessity of forgiveness. He opens with this statement:

23 *"Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. 24 When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. (Matthew 18:23,24).*

Now many of us know the rest of the parable, that the servant is unwilling to forgive a far smaller debt and that incongruity is devastating for the servant. But I want to point our attention to the debt given here. The servant owes the king *ten thousand talents*. One talent was worth about 20 years of labor, so 10,000 talents would be the equivalent of 3,000 lifetimes of labor. That is A LOT of debt. How can this be? Do we believe that we are *that* indebted to God because of our sin? Pastor Small just finished preaching a sermon series on Hell. Do we believe that it would be *just* of God to judge us according to our sin and send us there for eternity if we forsake His grace in Jesus?

This is not an easy thing for us to believe, but it is what the Bible teaches. As modern westerners, we recoil at believing this. We believe that we are good people who sometimes do bad. But here's the truth: common grace, the rule of law, and the Holy Spirit have hemmed us in from what we would have been capable of in the right circumstances. We are becoming increasingly aware of the heinous evil that has been done by those elites who were entangled with Jeffrey Epstein. The Bible teaches that *that* potential for evil is in every human heart. How else can we explain the horrific moments of human history without arrogantly claiming to be an exception?

The Bible teaches some really stark things about sin. It teaches that sin is not merely that we've done wrong, it's that we LOVE doing wrong and we LOVE obeying ourselves rather than God. We were intended to love and serve in perfect harmony but in our natural, unregenerate state, were in outright rebellion whether it feels that way or not. The Bible also teaches that our desires are distorted. We are attracted to that which is ugly to God and what is beautiful to God is often ugly to us. Here is what Jesus says to Nicodemus, another Pharisee that was open to Jesus.

*19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people **loved** the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things **hates** the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. (John 3:19,20)*

Do you see the language? We love darkness and we hate the light. It's not that we merely do dark things, it's that in our unaided state, we love the dark.

I am not saying humans are without dignity; we are all made in God's image and therefore have infinite value and all should be treated with love and respect. I'm also not saying that people always do bad. But I'm trying to point out that maybe our goodness doesn't originate in us, but in God. And maybe we have different sin bank accounts only because the grace of God has kept us from what we are capable of under the right circumstances. There are no different categories of human beings. The most tender among us are capable of heinous evil and the most darkened among us is able to become a great trophy of grace in God's hands.

Jesus is also demonstrating something else very important here. Sin isn't just our debt of wrongs, but also is the reason we can't see the nature or quantity of the balance we owe. Simon sees himself as far more righteous than he actually is and he sees sin as a list of wrongs, rather than a continuous rebellion towards God. He doesn't realize that he owes Jesus 3,000 lifetimes of debt or that he can't repay it. Sin blinds us from spiritual sight, which is needed for us to ask for the forgiveness we so desperately need. Do you see the desperate state that the human race is in? If so, then you are on your way to being a transformed, soft-hearted lover of Jesus and people. We must also gain spiritual sight to see who Jesus really is.

Seeing Jesus

Point two, seeing Jesus. The woman and Simon don't just see their sin differently, they also see Jesus differently. Simon is certainly intrigued by Jesus, but he's only halfway in with Jesus. He thinks Jesus is merely a prophet, and even doubts

that when Jesus allows this woman to wash his feet. When he forgives her sins, the bystanders ask this question: *"Who is this, who even forgives sins?"* The question arises elsewhere in the gospels when Jesus forgives sins. In Mark's gospel, the scribes are outraged when he heals and forgives the paralytic saying, *"Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:7)*

So Jesus is forgiving sins and receiving worship and adoration from this woman. The question before us this morning is what do we do with this information? Are these things fitting? Is Jesus the son of God? Do we see him in his glory?

I think followers of Jesus should long to see him the way Peter did. He often was ahead of the other disciples in his perception in the gospel accounts. At the beginning of their journey together, Jesus asked Peter to cast his net to catch more fish after a fruitless night of fishing. They obeyed and the nets began to break because of the overwhelming catch. Peter, sensing that Jesus was unique in his authority and power, responded by saying *"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." (Luke 5:8)*. And later when Jesus asked the question, who do you say I am, Peter responded by saying *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:16)*.

And here is Jesus' reply to Peter -

17 And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:17,18)

Friends, I hope you see in Jesus' words that we cannot simply try harder to see the spiritual realities at play, but we need to have them revealed to us. God will open our eyes when we ask in prayer and seek His face in His Word. If we see Jesus truly as Lord, the Son of God, we will be transformed. This leads me to my third point. We must gain spiritual sight to see the reality of forgiveness.

Seeing Forgiveness

So we know we need to see our sinfulness and see who Jesus is. But we also need to know that in Jesus, there is forgiveness. We need to receive the gospel. I'm going to read an Old Testament passage that shows the progression of the one who perceives these realities. Let's look at the instance of Isaiah's calling. Here is a vision that Isaiah gets swept up into in preparation for his ministry as a prophet to the southern kingdom of Judah.

6 In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called to another and said:

*"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory!"*

4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. 5 And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7 And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for." (Isaiah 6:1-7)

Friends, this is the mystical life of the follower of Jesus. Come with me into the throne room of our Holy God this morning. We are in the Holy of Holies. Jesus is on the right hand of the father, possessing all authority and holiness. We are small creatures who possess all sinfulness. And in the midst of the despair this causes, we are given a burning coal to our lips and we are told, *"your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for."*

This is the gospel, church. Do you see how seeing the magnitude of the gap covered between our sin and God's holiness leads us to see the magnificence of God's grace? Do you see how John Newton can say in the most famous hymn ever written, *"amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me?"* We must see the gap to see the amazing quality of this grace.

How does such a gap get covered? Is it merely a "forgive and forget" scenario? We know forgiveness isn't actually like that. The forgiver must absorb the damage done if he or she does not require recompense from the offender. If you steal a million dollars, it doesn't just get forgotten, how could it be? So how does God absorb the cost? He does so by taking it on His own self on the cross. Jesus faces the full gap. The difference between God's holiness and our collective sin, Jesus takes into himself on the cross. We must see that this forgiveness is available and covers us in the gospel, or we will not be able to bear the weight of our sin and God's righteousness.

It is through this sight that we become like this woman. I want to draw out a few implications with a brief final point—becoming a lover of Jesus.

Becoming Lovers

It is essential to note that it is because this woman is forgiven that she pours out her love. It is not to earn forgiveness. She is justified in God's sight, and this secure grace motivates her radical behavioral change. The result is an emotional outpouring that is real, not forced. Do her acts look religious? Hardly. It is messy and passionate and almost reckless. And while religion may scoff at this, I want us to see her example as the goal of the Christian life. To give our all for Jesus, why? Because he gave his all for us. He is beautiful and full of grace. Let us meditate on what we see in her briefly. Here are three meditations for you to reflect on this week.

1.) She lets her hair down with Jesus. She is *vulnerable* with him. She lets him in. Friends, God wants you to let your hair down for Him. Seek intimacy. Share your deepest hopes and fears with him. He wants your heart. You can trust Him. Will you give God level ten access to your heart?

2.) She lets her tears flow. She *feels* the weight of who Jesus is and what he has done for her. I want us Presbyterians to get more emotional with God. Don't force it, but also don't suppress it when the Spirit reveals to your heart who Jesus is and what he has done for you. Pour out your heart and let your affections get stirred. It won't always feel this way, but at times it is right to feel like you are falling in love or beholding a great

beauty you couldn't have previously imagined. It is good for us to have tears in worship, church.

3.) Finally, she gives Jesus her treasures. Her alabaster ointment would have been both the most valuable thing she had and also one of the tools she used in her profession. She gives it to Jesus, simultaneously repenting of her career and also showing that Jesus is her new greatest treasure. Her love for Jesus changes her whole lifestyle. It also changes how she holds her treasures. It is good to be calculated and wise in how we give to God, but sometimes it's okay to be so taken by Him that we are what I will call "*wisely reckless*" with the outpouring of our giving.

Listen, all three of these dynamics challenge me deeply. I have a long way to go. But together let's move towards having hearts that are heating up to God. Let's keep our lamp lights burning waiting for the bridegroom. He could come any day. The prevailing metaphor of the Bible is that God loves His people like a groom loves his bride. We are made to be wrapped up in this love.

Conclusion

Friends, we must pray to the Spirit to give us spiritual sight to see the weight of our sin, the glory of Jesus, and the great forgiveness of the gospel. It is through this sight, that our hearts melt in the hands of our groom, Jesus. Jesus invites us to get lost in his love, because he is the type of groom who forgives his bride and gives his life for her—for us. May we pour out our hearts to this groom, who washes our feet and pours out his heart for us. Jesus said "*he who is forgiven little, loves little,*" which makes the

converse statement true, "he who is forgiven much, loves much." We are forgiven much, so we will love much. Until he returns and then on into eternity forever.

In the name of The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit, amen.