



Forgiven Much, Loves Much

Luke 7:36-50

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Beloved, I believe that all of us would agree that there is no way that we can just jump right back into the book of Matthew after what we talked about last week. Coming face-to-face with the reality that we, as individuals and as a church body, had left our first love for Christ is a humbling and painful thing. It demands that we do what Jesus said we must do – remember, repent, and repeat. I do not doubt that we desire to love Christ, to love Him as He deserves to be loved and that we do want to feel deeply and passionately about Christ. I do believe that it is our desire not to give our hearts to things that dampen our affections and desires for Jesus and that Christ would restore our ability to feel deeply about the things that matter, about Him. There is no 12-step program for falling in love with Jesus again. For that reason, we are going to take a few weeks to remember what it is to love Christ and we are going to look this morning at one of the most picturesque expressions and accounts of free, unfettered, unreserved, unrestrained and abundant love for Christ in all of Scripture. What I want to do this morning is to make sure that we don't overanalyze this story and miss the heart of its meaning. What we need to do is to place ourselves in the midst of this story and let it speak to us. I want you to look with me at Luke 7:36ff.

Wow. What a picture from the Bible of extravagant love to Christ. This picture is breathtaking. Beloved, if we had been in attendance at the house of Simon, we would have been shocked by what took place, because it is completely out of the ordinary. It is shocking to say the least. Let me set the scene for you. This story takes place at a formal dinner party in ancient Israel. That is important to know because in those days, formal dinner parties often took place in an open courtyard that was considered to be a part of the house. They were public events in which the neighbors felt free to stand around the sides of the courtyard to observe the dinner party as it took place. There would be the table that at which the guests who had actually been invited would sit and then there was room for interested observers to watch and to listen to the conversation and discussion that was taking place. That helps us to understand how this unnamed woman in our story is able to have such access to Jesus.

There were also certain formalities that were to be followed as it concerned the guests of the meal. It was expected for the host to greet his invited guests with three things: 1) a kiss of welcome, 2) water for their feet, and 3) oil to anoint their head. The kiss was a mark of affection, the water allowed the guest to wash the dust from their feet before they reclined at the table, and the oil, usually some kind of fragrant oil was rubbed on the forehead of the guest as a kind of sweet-smelling perfume. They were common courtesies and to omit them would send a message to the person that you had invited to dinner and that is true here. Simon ignored the proper customs with Jesus. Simon had invited Jesus to dinner as a curiosity, to examine Him, really to look for a way to catch Jesus in some way. The Pharisees, back in Luke 5 had already determined that from their perspective, Jesus was a blasphemer. This was not a case of honest interest by Simon at all. So let's take up the story:

One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. 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...(Luke 7:36-37) Jesus is reclining around the table with all of the other dinner guests of Simon, when a woman of the city, one who was a sinner, all of a sudden shows up in their midst. Luke is delicate in referring to her as a "sinner." That is tactful way of saying that she was a prostitute. "Sinner" was often used as a term of derision and contempt by the self-righteous Pharisees to refer to men who were tax collectors or women who were sold their bodies for money. This woman had a reputation, a reputation as a great sinner.

Having learned that Jesus was at Simon's house, she took a flask of ointment, a flask of perfume, and she came to Simon's house specifically to see Jesus. I am not sure that there is any way for us to fully appreciate the commotion this caused or the moral offense that she was to Simon and all of the other self respecting people who were gathered around the table or around the courtyard to watch the meal. As soon as this woman would have been noticed in the courtyard, the heads would have turned, the tongues would have started to wag. I'm certain there were harsh words, gawking and stares of disapproval. As the murmuring continues and as the meal is being served, this sinner woman walks up behind Jesus and stands at his feet. What follows is one of the purest expressions of love for Christ that is found anywhere in the Bible.

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. (Luke 7:38) Simon looks on, stunned along with everyone else, as this woman does something unrehearsed, something that rises spontaneously from the depths of her heart, something so overwhelmingly raw and real and genuine and tender and affectionate and loving, and something so shocking, so scandalous to everyone who is watching. Apparently intending to honor Him by simply anointing Jesus' feet with expensive perfume, instead, as she stands at His feet, she looks upon Christ and her heart is so moved that she begins to cry uncontrollably. As these great teardrops well up and flow from her eyes, they splash on Jesus' feet – literally the word there for wet is a word that is used to describe a shower -- rivers of tears washing away the dirt and the dust on Christ's feet. Seeing this and being overcome with emotion, she uses her tears to wash his feet and then undoes her hair and lets it fall upon his feet, using it to dry them. For a woman to let her hair down in public was considered a grave act of immodesty but we see that she had lost sight of everyone in the courtyard and around the courtyard but Jesus. Then she begins to smother his feet with kisses, that is the idea of the verb that is used here, she kisses his feet profusely, over and over again, oblivious to anyone or anything else but Jesus. Finally she anoints his feet with the oil. She is generous, affectionate, impulsive, demonstrative, emotional, passionate, adoring, uninhibited, unreserved, and extravagant in her expression of love to Jesus and she doesn't care who sees. Listen, she didn't plan all of this in advance. She had come to anoint Jesus' feet, but as she wept and the tears began to flow, all the rest just happens. What an amazing expression of love.

Do you see it beloved? This expression of love, this outpouring of love – it was real. She was real in her love for Christ. She was unconcerned with appearances or what other people might say about the extravagance of her devotion. In fact, she was completely preoccupied with the person of Jesus Christ. This sinful woman who worshipped at Jesus' feet was preoccupied with Him and Him alone. The fact that there were those present that disdained her and held her in contempt, the fact that there were those there who disbelieved and privately mocked Christ did not matter to her. She only cared about blessing Jesus and expressing her love to Him. The fact that she was in a room full of hypocrites starting with Simon the Pharisee did not prevent her from expressing her love to Christ.

This was no dry, dead, perfunctory sort of "thank you." She wept, she caressed his feet, she kissed them profusely, she anointed them with her best gift. She was not restrained in her passion. This is no half-hearted overture; she holds nothing back as she expresses her feelings for the Lord. She was not tentative in her approach, but whole-hearted. It is not that she was

doing this to draw attention to herself. That is not her motive. Jesus would have rejected her had that been the case. She expressed her love in the best way that she could to the Lover of her soul, and she did it with abandon. She wasn't following a generic script. She expressed her love for Jesus from the depth of her soul.

The room would have been filled with the smell of the fragrant oil—and with the sense of shock over all that was happening. This was scandalous—the way this sinful woman was touching Jesus! Her actions toward Him were very intimate and personal; and were probably making everyone else in at the table feel very uncomfortable. The truth beloved is this. If we are honest, for most of us -- if not all of us -- if we were in that courtyard as she was crying and washing and drying with her hair and kissing and anointing Jesus' feet – we would have thought to ourselves – how unseemly, how over-the-top, how undignified, how disgraceful, how shameful, how...inappropriate. Yeah...that's the word...inappropriate. We would have thought her spontaneous, uninhibited expression of love to be just slightly inappropriate and yet, in truth, it was the only appropriate response to Christ in the whole place.

Where does that kind of love come from? What is the source of that overwhelming love? We are about to find out. Simon of course was clueless. He observes all of this happening and Luke tells us:

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." (Luke 7:39) In Simon's mind what is taking place is all very simple. Jesus cannot be a prophet because he has no idea about the kind of woman this is, for if He did, He would have recoiled from her and asked for her removal from His presence. Jesus should have been offended, in Simon's mind, because Simon would have been offended. Simon would never let a woman like that touch him and especially to touch Him like that, in such an intimate and affectionate sort of way. To Simon, she was disgusting, revolting, and dirty and yet Jesus was allowing her to do this. He didn't pull His feet away from her. He didn't attempt to restrain her at all. He doesn't stop her kisses or push her away and say, "Now, let's not go overboard, a simple thank you will be enough, no need to be so expressive." No, Jesus receives it all and does so gladly. Being more than a prophet and knowing Simon's heart better than Simon knows it himself, he answers his thoughts, telling him a story.

And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher." "A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." (Luke 7:40-43) Simon, ever the hypocrite, calls Jesus teacher and Jesus begins to tell him an exceedingly simple story, one that would have seemed almost too easy, too simple for Simon who as a Pharisee would have been accustomed to much more intricate and complex teaching. This is a parable, which quite honestly, would have been beneath someone like Simon. It is obvious that the one who has been forgiven the greater amount will be most grateful, most loving to the one who has forgiven him. It is a simple, easy to understand parable because Jesus wants to make sure that Simon get the point. Jesus then turns his back to Simon – that is huge – pick it up in verse 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. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. (Luke 7:44-46) Simon shunned the woman because she was a sinner, and expected Jesus to do likewise. Jesus asks Simon, "Do you see this woman?" The truth is that he saw her outward appearance but had no clue about her heart. But Jesus is going to open the window a little by comparing them to one another. Simon did not show Jesus even the minimum courtesy of washing His feet. This woman not only washed His feet, she did it with her tears and her hair. Simon did not bestow a kiss on Jesus' face; the woman did not cease to kiss the feet of Jesus, which, at first, were dirty feet. Simon did not anoint the head of Jesus with oil; the woman anointed His feet with expensive perfume. The woman far, far, far outdid Simon in showing love to the Lord. The woman in Simon's mind was the greatest of sinners, but she was also a great lover of Christ and Jesus makes clear the reason why. He says to Simon...

Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven--for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." (Luke 7:47) Here is the source of the love poured out by this woman on Jesus. Here is the source for such a lavish display of affection and gratitude. Literally, what Jesus is saying her is: "Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven, and the evidence of this is that she loves much..." This is so important to understand. The phrase that says here that her sins "are forgiven" is a perfect passive indicative. It means that she had been forgiven sometime in the past and would continue to remain forgiven. At some other time, that Luke does not record for us, this woman who had been sexually impure, whose life had become

synonymous with sin, whose sins were many, had come to Jesus, She had heard him preach the gospel of the Kingdom and had she believed in Him as the Messiah, as the Savior, as the Redeemer of lost sinners. She had trusted in Christ and she had heard him say the words “You are forgiven.” She had heard the gospel and repented of her sins and placed her faith in Christ and she had been forgiven. The crushing load of her debt before God, her guilt, had been lifted, the bondage of sin removed, the shame taken away. She who was once known as a sinner had been forgiven, made pure and whole, and she had come into this courtyard to this dinner forgiven and determined to pour out her love and gratitude to the One who had forgiven her. Jesus is saying in effect, “Simon, you cannot understand what just took place and the reason you cannot understand that kind of love is because you do not believe that you need to be forgiven much if at all and so you are not forgiven and so you do not love me like she does.” She loves much because she has been forgiven much.

The one who is forgiven much, loves much. Don't miss this. She worshipped and loved Jesus and magnified Him like that, because she knew the depth of her forgiveness, she knew the depth of the freedom and new life Christ had given to her. She didn't need to be begged or cajoled or coaxed to love Jesus and worship Jesus because she knew all that she had been delivered from. She was no longer what she once had been, a woman weighed down with the burden of sin. The heavy debt that was hers had been forgiven, and the proof of that forgiveness was demonstrated in her act of loving worship toward the Lord. Mark this down. You will have love and gratitude; you will find joy in worshipping and loving Jesus Christ in exact proportion with your sense of your own forgiveness, your own need. When you are aware that you have been greatly forgiven, you will greatly love Christ. But when you forget or if you think you have only been forgiven a very little, your love for Christ will wane or you will not love him at all.

Don't overanalyze this parable, beloved. Jesus is not saying that there are various levels of love that people have for him based upon the amount of sin that they have committed and have had forgiven and that those various levels of love are appropriate and acceptable with Him. That is not it. We are all the prostitute in this story. He deserves passionate love from all of us. Beloved, do you see it? If we have been saved, if we have been forgiven, if we have been delivered from the grip of sin and hell and death, we ought to desperately love Christ. If we find our love to Christ fading, if this lavish expression of love by this woman seems to be extravagant and inappropriate, we simply don't love Christ as she did and the reason is because we have forgotten what we were and what we would have been if Christ had not found us. We

have forgotten the greatness of Christ's forgiveness. When our sinfulness seems small, our love will be too.

This is personal. It has to be personal. For the woman, this forgiven sinner, it was personal. It has to be. I know this. I had nothing to offer Christ, nothing to give Him, nothing and yet he saved me, he forgave my wickedness, He freed me from the shackles of my Sin, He redeemed me from my pitiful life, cleansed me from my sinfulness, graced me, blessed me, matured me in the midst of my failures, disciplined me when I went astray, delivered me from evil, renewed a right Spirit in me. He has forgiven me...all out of His grace. That is why I love Him and it is why I want to love Him more deeply. The more I see this, the more I see Him with eyes of faith, the more I fall in love with Jesus in a deeper, more overwhelming, and more personal way. As I continue to understand more deeply by faith how much He has loved me and continues to love me, how much He has forgiven me and continues to forgive me, I grow to love Him even that much more. This woman loved much because she was forgiven much.

Jesus then speaks to the woman for the first time. Luke tells us: "And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."" (Luke 7:48-50) Jesus looks at this woman, who loves Him so deeply, and he affirms her love and tells her, "Your sins are forgiven." Again it is that perfect tense...Your sins have been forgiven and they continue to be forgiven. Why does Jesus say this to her? Is it to affirm her in front of everyone else? That may be part of it, but I think the reason that Jesus says this is to fill her soul with joy. It is to remind her, that though her sin was great, her Savior is greater. It is to guard her heart from despair and to instead increase her delight in Him – the forgiving One. "You remain forgiven"

Those that are gathered around, watching this scene, are amazed and confused and remain confounded by Christ. While this woman, who has been saved by faith in Christ, and who loves Him deeply having been forgiven all her sin, goes in peace, satisfied in Christ her Lord. "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." He never says, "Don't sell your body." He doesn't have to. He has her heart. If Christ has our hearts, He will have everything else. If our hearts belong to Him, so will our hands, mouth, feet, eyes, ears, emotions and will. If Christ has our love he has our all. Christ has her heart because Christ has loved her first.

How is your love to Christ? How are you expressing it? Do you love Him the way that we have heard it described this morning? What does your faith, your praise, your delight in Him, your personal sacrifice, your obedience to His commands, your devotions to His worship, your faithfulness in giving, your faithfulness to His church – what does it say about your love? Are you deeply and passionately in love with Him? Do you show it? Are you a worshipper who loves Christ and is unafraid to show it? How is your love to Christ this morning?

Beloved, I know that I do not love Christ as much as I want to. I know my love for Him needs to deepen and grow and I believe that is your heart also, so in light of this text this morning, how do we shepherd our hearts to love Christ more deeply? I believe that this woman offers to us a pattern worth repeating. Look at yourself and then gaze upon your Savior. Look at what you were, at what your sinful flesh still desires to be, at how you still stumble and fall sometimes. You have not kept God's law. You have given yourself to idols. You have not loved God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. You have not loved your neighbor as yourself. You have lied. You have stolen. You have murdered in your heart. You have gossiped. You have torn down the reputation of another. You have coveted. You have been proud. You have been unrighteously angry. You would have been far worse had it not been for the restraining grace of God. When we examine ourselves in the mirror of God's Word...this is what we know we are by nature – sinful men and sinful women. By nature, this is who we are. And what do we deserve? Hell, wrath, death.

Look at yourself but then gaze upon Jesus, gaze upon your Savior. Take a good long look at your beautiful Savior, Jesus Christ. He came preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God. He came to seek and save the lost. He is the only Savior, the One who set His love upon you in eternity past and who determined to do all that was necessary to deliver you from the penalty that your sins deserved. It was His love despite your sin that caused Jesus to humble Himself and lay aside His rights as God, shroud His glory in flesh and make Himself of no reputation. It was His love despite your sin that made Him suffer the opposition and hatred of sinners against Himself. It was His love despite your sin that drove Christ to sweat drops of blood in Gethsemane, love despite your sin that drove him offered His back to be flayed in scourging, love despite your sin that offered His brow for the crown of thorns to be driven deep, love despite your sin that took the nails deep into His wrists and feet, love despite your sin that endured His Father's face to be turned from Him and which drove Him to suffer the wrath of the Father and the agony that you sin deserved in your place. Gaze in awe at Jesus dying on the cross, His body broken, His blood shed for you--the sinless one in the sinners' stead--to pay off the debt you could never pay. You are forgiven because of Christ. Raised from the dead, your Savior can tell you, "Your sins are

forgiven.” Just as he forgave that sinful woman when she trusted in Him, so He has forgiven you.

Beloved, that is why we must love our Savior so much. It’s because of his great love for us. How is your love to Christ? Forgiven much...love much.

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