

Jesus' Grace Produces Love

Luke 7:36-50

Key Verse: 7:47

"Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven--for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."

In this passage we meet two very different people. One is a prominent Pharisee named Simon. The other is a nameless woman who had lived a sinful life. Simon is a successful religious leader. The woman is a moral failure and a social outcast. However, the woman repents and receives the grace of Jesus. This grace transforms her into a woman of love, a love of the most exquisite quality. Jesus uses her to illustrate a very important truth: Jesus' grace produces love. Most of us want to love Jesus fervently like the woman. This pleases Jesus most and makes our lives joyful. Yet we find ourselves like the Pharisee, cold-hearted and critical, more often than we like to admit. Today let's learn how we can have the love of Jesus burning in our hearts.

First, a sinful woman comes to Jesus by faith. Look at verse 36. "Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table." These kinds of dinners were strictly limited to the elite. Well dressed people mingled--eating fine food, drinking choice wine, and sharing erudite conversation--enhancing business, prestige and privilege. Seats of honor were carefully assigned to show proper respect to those in power. It may be comparable to a modern political fundraiser, where people pay \$1,000 a person to dine with senators or congressmen. This Pharisee's dinner party is not where we expect Jesus to be. But when Jesus was invited, he went there. Jesus must have wanted to preach the gospel to the rich and powerful when he had the opportunity. Jesus was neither disgusted nor intimidated by them. Jesus was a shepherd for the rich and famous people too.

People were enjoying the party, and first-class guests told silly jokes, which second-class guests pretended to laugh at. Then, suddenly, a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town entered the dinner party. We can understand the meaning of "a sinful life." She had been a promiscuous woman. At one time she must have been very beautiful, like a blossoming flower. She wanted to find the one true love who would make her happy forever. But as she looked around, she found few couples in that legalistic

society who seemed truly in love. Many looked like Tevye and his wife Golde in "Fiddler on the Roof." When Tevye asked, "Do you love me?" Golde said, "For twenty-five years I washed your socks." Such couples stayed together to obey the law, and for the sake of children, but they did not look passionate. So this romantic woman decided to ignore their social system, and seek true love in her own way. She found a handsome, athletic and intelligent man, pursued him aggressively, and won his heart. She felt euphoric while the romance lasted, but it did not long endure. Perhaps it was because she wanted to be treated like a princess, but he demanded to be served like a king. Soon, their promising romance turned into selfish bickering and they broke it off. She was single again, but no longer pure or idealistic. She had an empty feeling, as though she had lost something she could not recover. Her view of life became jaded. To be sure, she could entice men and enjoy them. But each relationship became shorter and shallower than the one before, and each ended in heartbreak. Now people despised her as "a sinful woman." What was worse, she was guilty before God and full of shame. Demons tormented her with condemnation and drove her to despair. She lived with regret gnawing at her soul, like dogs at a bone. However, one day, she heard the good news about Jesus. Jesus taught that sin was our real problem, and that he has authority to forgive sins. Jesus demonstrated this by healing a paralytic. Jesus did not despise sinners and avoid them, like the religious leaders did. Jesus was a friend of sinners. The woman understood who Jesus was and why he came. She admitted that sin was her real problem and accepted Jesus' claim to forgive sins. It was the best news to her. Something happened inside: Hope came alive. Her soul began to wake up to God's love and goodness. Believing that Jesus could solve her sin problem, she was compelled to come to Jesus. When she heard that Jesus was at the Pharisee's house, she went there, burst into the dinner party, and stood behind Jesus. Of course, she knew that all the people in the room were appalled at her action. But she did not care. She came to Jesus as she was by faith. Sinners can come to Jesus by faith.

Second, the woman's genuine repentance. This woman did not come empty-handed. She brought an alabaster jar of perfume with her. Most working class women would not own such perfume, which was probably worth about a year's wages. It is hard to imagine a \$30,000 bottle of perfume. But there is a perfume on the market today which sells for \$190,000. The bottle is made of the finest crystal, with a five carat white diamond in the cap, and a golden band around the bottle's neck. If a woman has such a bottle of perfume, she saves it for the most important occasion--for marriage. This woman must

have saved this perfume for her true love. No one deserved it. But when she knew who Jesus was, she was convinced he was worthy of her treasure.

As the woman stood there, she began to weep. They were tears of repentance expressing the godly sorrow of her heart. She knew that she had sinned against God. She admitted that her terrible sin had hurt others badly. She did not make excuses, blame others, or try to justify herself. She stood before the Lord taking responsibility for her sin. She could not undo her mistakes. All she could do was to come to Jesus and ask his mercy. Her tears also expressed her gratitude to Jesus. She believed that Jesus would accept her and forgive her at great cost to himself. She was truly, deeply thankful.

The woman's tears began to flow steadily, falling on Jesus' feet, and mingling with the road dust, until it made quite a mess. In order to clean and dry Jesus' feet, she needed a wash cloth and a towel. But there were none, and she could expect no help from the crowd around her. She found it fitting to use her hair. As we know, hair is important to a woman; it is the symbol of her beauty and glory. Most women spend a lot of time and money to make their hair look just right. The late Farrah Fawcett became famous mainly because she could flip her long, blonde hair in just the right way. In the past, this woman used her hair to attract men to herself and win their attention and favor; it had been one of her secret weapons. But now she offered it Jesus to wash his feet. She came to him with self-abasement and a humble heart. She was nothing. Jesus was everything to her. She kissed Jesus' feet and poured her perfume on them. She was very affectionate toward Jesus.

Here we learn real repentance. It is not lip service. It is an act of faith. Although she was a terrible sinner, she believed that Jesus would forgive her. It is also an act of love. She offered her best gift to Jesus with many kisses. It is also humble and leads to genuine commitment. Finally, it is an act of contrition, admitting one's sin with godly sorrow. She reminds us of King David. After committing the terrible sins of adultery and murder, he repented with tears, saying: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Ps 51:17). The Lord accepts this kind of repentance. Let's learn to repent as this woman did.

Third, Jesus reveals his grace to a legalistic Pharisee. People must have been shocked that the woman had come into the dinner party. They were even more shocked by her outlandish behavior. No one knew what to say. But they did not stop thinking. The Pharisee said to himself, "If this man were a

prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is--that she is a sinner." To him, the role of a prophet was to expose sin and ostracize sinners. When Jesus failed to do this, he doubted Jesus' spirituality. The Pharisees were strictly legalistic. They thought they worked hard, obeyed the law, and deserved to enjoy their privileges. However, sinners who broke the law and did not measure up to their standard were to be cast out. This Pharisee was well disciplined, educated and successful. But he was ignorant of God's love for sinners and of his own need for grace.

So Jesus began to teach him, saying, "Simon, I have something to tell you." Jesus spoke humbly, in the dialogue form of a Pharisee, and told him a story. Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii (about \$50,000) and the other owed him fifty denarii (about \$5,000). Neither of them could pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. This illustrates gospel truth. All men, including Pharisees, are debtors or sinners in the sight of God. No one deserves God's acceptance. Some may be greater debtors than others. But none of us can repay our debt of sin, and as a result face death, judgment and eternal condemnation. However, God, in his great mercy, cancels our debts by his one-sided grace. As Romans 3:23-24 say, "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." This gospel truth must underlie our thoughts and actions. Then we will not waste time trying to be better sinners than others. Instead, we can thank God always and share God's grace joyfully with others.

Jesus finished his story with a pointed question: "Now which of them will love him more?" The answer was so obvious: the one who had the bigger debt canceled. The Pharisee answered well and Jesus gave him an A+. Here Jesus teaches us God's view of sinners. God sees that the greater sinner can love him more. God has great hope for great sinners. St. Paul was one such great sinner. At one time, he was an enemy of Christ and the church who threatened to destroy Christians. He dragged men--and even women--off to prison, and consented to stoning Stephen. All of the early Christians were afraid of him and might have prayed for him to die soon. But the Risen Christ saw him as a chosen instrument. The Risen Christ visited him and extended his saving grace. Paul accepted this grace and Jesus' calling as an apostle. This ignited a burning love for Jesus in Paul's heart. Paul poured out the rest of his earthly life in service to Jesus. He suffered much, worked harder and achieved more than others. He said, "I worked harder than all of

them--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me" (1 Co 15:10). We all need God's grace. As grace increases in our hearts, we can love Jesus more.

However, Simon could not recognize Jesus' grace because he thought he was a little better than others. This pride blinded him. So he remained arrogant, critical and dry. In order to help Simon, Jesus compared him to the woman: "I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet." Simon must have been shocked to hear Jesus' words. He was a dignified Pharisee and the woman was a despicable sinner. But Jesus spoke favorably about the woman and unfavorably about Simon. Jesus pointed out that the woman's love was wholehearted, affectionate, humble and sacrificial. However, the Pharisee was cold hearted. He even failed to show basic hospitality to his guest. The woman received an A+ in loving Jesus, while the Pharisee barely moved the love meter above zero. Jesus was not impressed with the gourmet food Simon served, or the notability of his guest list. Jesus only mentioned his lack of love. On the other hand, Jesus did not elaborate on the woman's terrible sins, but he recalled in loving detail each of her acts of service. Jesus remembers his people's acts of love and treasures them in his heart.

Jesus concluded in verse 47, "Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven--for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little." Here we must realize two things. In the first place, we learn that what Jesus wants is our love: love for him and love for others. So we should be most concerned about love. As we learned in 1 Corinthians 13, even if we do many great things, if we have not love, it is nothing. Love is the essential attribute that Jesus wants us to have. So we have to pay attention to how much we love Jesus and others. We can be happy when our love is flaming hot, and we should be sorrowful if our love grows cold.

In the second place, there is a relationship between Jesus' grace to us and our love for Jesus. Those who truly receive the grace of forgiveness of sins will love Jesus with all their hearts. The more one receives grace, the more he or she will love Jesus. However, if love for Jesus is not burning in our hearts, there is something lacking in our sense of God's grace. Sometimes we forget God's grace. If so, we must pray for God to help us remember the precious grace of Jesus we have received.

Now we must ask ourselves whether we are like the woman in this passage or the Pharisee. Is love for Jesus like a flaming fire in our hearts? Or have our hearts grown cold? Cold hearts reveal a lack of grace. This does not mean that we need to sin in order to experience grace. It means that we need to acknowledge the sins we have already committed before God. We need to be aware of our sins and ask Jesus' grace of forgiveness.

Jennifer Stumpf was once a glamorous fashion model. She tasted the deep emptiness of that way of life and cried out to God for help. Through one-to-one Bible study with Marsha Teodori she met Jesus personally and received his grace of forgiveness of sins. She became most happy and loving. Now she is humbly supporting her husband of five years, Dr. Andy Stumpf, with prayer and the love of God, and he has grown up as a national leader for Canadian UBF ministry. God blessed their family with a daughter Leah, a son Isaiah, and just yesterday another son, Hudson Thomas Stumpf.

Missionary Birgit Pierce was once a romantic young woman who acted in school plays and pursued love interests. She wanted to build her own kingdom and be in charge of her life. But through sincere Bible study with M. Kaleb and Sarah Hong she accepted Jesus' prayer, "Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come." She gave up her kingdom in favor of God's kingdom. Through the 1988 Summer Bible Conference she experienced that the kingdom of God is where Jesus is and it is real. She surrendered her life to Jesus. By faith she moved to Chicago as a missionary and married Dr. Dan Pierce. They had three beautiful daughters together. Then Dr. Dan went to be with the Lord. M. Birgit accepted God's sovereignty in this matter and rededicated herself to the Lord as a missionary. She has devoted herself to raising her children in God, participating in CBF wholeheartedly, serving as Chicago UBF treasurer, and participating in the woman's ministry. She carries out one-to-one Bible study faithfully and is always ready to serve guests. She does this prayerfully, often shedding many tears from her heart. Last week her testimony planted missionary vision in many European coworkers.

Fourth, Jesus forgives her sins and gives her peace. Look at verse 48. "Then Jesus said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven'" (48). Jesus had already accepted the woman's repentant heart and there was a bond of love between them. Still, he said, "Your sins are forgiven." This was Jesus' public declaration as the Righteous Judge. No one in heaven or on earth could bring any charge against her, for Jesus had forgiven her. Her debt of sin was canceled. Then Jesus said to her, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (50). Jesus

credited her faith for saving her. It was her faith that enabled her to come to Jesus. It was her faith that enabled her to repent of her sins with all her heart. Her faith had saved her. Jesus also gave her peace. It was peace with God that comes when enmity with God is resolved through his forgiveness. It is a peace that gives true and lasting rest to our souls. We are no longer God's enemies, but we become God's children. This peace is given to all who accept Jesus' grace of forgiveness by faith (Ro 5:1). Jesus' grace and peace elevated this woman as a princess in the heavenly kingdom.

In this passage we learn that Jesus' grace produces the fruit of burning love in our hearts. This kind of love can truly change our campuses and our nation. But let's remember that we cannot produce this love by our effort; it only comes from Jesus' grace. Let's ask the Lord to help us renew his grace in our hearts, so that love for him may motivate our service this fall semester.