

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, Jesus attends a dinner party and encounters two very different people. One is a Pharisee and the other a woman who had lived a sinful life. Jesus forgave the woman's sins. Jesus rebuked the Pharisee's cold heart. We want to learn how to obtain Jesus' grace of forgiveness. And we must realize that Jesus' grace produces love.

First, a sinful woman came to Jesus by faith (36-37).

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." By this point in Luke's gospel, the Pharisees have become familiar figures. They first appeared in 5:17, when Jesus forgave a paralytic's sins and then healed his paralysis. It was God's life-giving work through Jesus. But they did not accept it. Instead, they began to raise theological arguments against Jesus. They continued to criticize Jesus for eating and drinking with tax collectors and healing on the Sabbath. They were chosen to be spiritual leaders and shepherds for their times. But they were useless to God and a hindrance to gospel ministry.

Now, one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to his home for a dinner party. Maybe this particular Pharisee considered himself a man of erudition who could entertain any kind of person, regardless of political or religious differences. Perhaps he had a habit of inviting celebrities to his home to enhance his social standing. It is evident that he did not invite Jesus with a pure motive; his basic attitude is skeptical and critical. Of course, Jesus knew this. But Jesus did not hesitate to accept the invitation. Jesus practiced his own teaching, "Love your enemies." Jesus went to the dinner party and reclined at the table. We usually think of Jesus going around Galilee with his dusty disciples with their growling stomachs. But here, Jesus is in the home of a Pharisee for a dinner party among the social elite. Servants were coming and going, carrying expensive gourmet food and choice wine. The guests of honor had a special place arranged for them while other, more ordinary guests, made up the gallery-like spectators. In those days, oratory was popular. When Pharisees gathered together, they entertained each other with sophisticated dialogue and clever stories.

Look at verse 37. "When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume...." Suddenly a woman came in who had lived a sinful life in that town. She is not named, probably to protect her. But the way she is introduced reveals that she had lost her purity as a woman and slipped into an immoral life. How did it happen? We don't really know. It may have happened when her curiosity about sinful pleasures overcame her. Maybe she was seduced by a worldly-wise older man, like Lara in "Dr. Zhivago." If she were a modern American girl, she may have succumbed to the temptation to be popular among her peers. Maybe it started on prom night against her will. Or maybe it started when she inadvertently visited the wrong website on her computer. In any case, she had made a fatal mistake that plunged her into an immoral lifestyle. Now she was known in her town as "the woman who had lived a sinful life," like the adulterous woman in "The Scarlet Letter" by Nathaniel Hawthorne. She could have no hope of marriage or decent family life. She was a tainted woman, a source of shame. Worst of all, she suffered from the torment of demons as a result of her sinful lifestyle.

This woman heard that Jesus had come to her town and was eating at the Pharisee's house. The name of Jesus was so sweet to her soul. She must have heard, like all people in Galilee, how Jesus healed the sick, drove out evil spirits and preached good news of the kingdom of God to the poor. Maybe she heard Jesus' words, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Lk 5:31,32). Anyway, when she heard the name, "Jesus," faith came into her heart. This faith gave her the power to come to Jesus. As a public sinner, she should not dare enter the Pharisee's dinner party. But she went in boldly by faith. As she appeared, some may have gasped: "What is she doing here?" But she didn't pay any attention. The shield of faith protected her heart from all accusers. She went to Jesus and stood behind him at his feet with her alabaster jar of perfume.

The alabaster jar of perfume was very expensive. She wanted to give it to Jesus to express her love and affection. One person wanted to give Dr. Samuel Lee a gift for his birthday. So he gave him his most precious treasure: a custom-made hand gun. Perhaps the gift was not really appropriate, but it expressed the giver's great affection. In the same way, the alabaster jar of perfume was not really a fitting gift for Jesus. But it was the best treasure the woman had. It was her way of saying to Jesus that he was the most precious one to her.

This woman who had lived a sinful life must have known the dark side of man. At one time, she must have poured her affection out toward one guy as if he were the only one in the world. In return, she was terribly disappointed. The more she got to know what was inside of men, the more disappointed and even disgusted she became. Finally she came to a conclusion that all men were jerks. But Jesus was different. Jesus had a shepherd's heart. Jesus was pure and holy. There was no hypocrisy or deceit in Jesus. She trusted Jesus. She saw God in Jesus. It was not through her woman's intuition; it was through faith that came into her heart when she heard the name of Jesus. This faith made it possible for her to come to Jesus. We can come to Jesus by faith.

Second, she repented with tears (38).

Look at verse 38. "...and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them." She was standing right behind Jesus. She must have realized the holiness of God in Jesus. She also realized the terrible nature of her sinful life. She remembered how she had broken her father's heart when she began to go astray. She remembered the people she had injured, emotionally and spiritually, in her abandonment to pleasure-seeking. Most of all, she realized that her sin had brought pain to God's heart (Gen 6:6). Tears began to well up in her eyes and roll down her cheeks. They fell on Jesus' feet until his feet were wet with her tears. Then she noticed that Jesus' feet had not been washed. She was shocked at people's indifference to Jesus. She could understand that Jesus was despised and rejected for the sake of sinners. So she began to cry all the more until her tears had wet Jesus' feet thoroughly.

She wanted to dry his feet, but she had no towel. So she began to wipe his feet with her hair. Maybe she had beautiful blonde hair, and it was her trademark. In the past, she had spent hours washing, conditioning and drying her hair. Then, after styling, if her hair did not fluff properly she had a "bad hair day." Hair is so important to a woman. Paul even said that a woman's hair is her glory (1Co 11:15). But now she took her beautiful hair and began to wipe Jesus' feet with it. It was her deep repentance. She no longer wanted to use her beauty and talents selfishly. She wanted to use everything for the glory of God, beginning with her beautiful hair. After she had dried his feet, she began to kiss them. Then she poured her alabaster jar of perfume on Jesus' feet. She gave her treasure to Jesus, pouring out her affection with holy respect. She gave her heart to Jesus. She offered her life to Jesus as a living sacrifice. It was a spiritual act of worship. It was a life-changing event and a history-making event. What a beautiful meeting between the Messiah and a sinful woman!

However, to Jesus, it was not easy to receive this woman at a dinner party surrounded by the social elite, where third-class photographers were sure to be sneaking around. As a spiritual leader, he had to maintain absolute purity in his relations with women. He should not be associated in any way with a woman who had lived a sinful life. Once Dr. Billy Graham was in Ireland to visit both Catholics and Protestants to make peace. As he walked down the road, he jumped up on a car and began to preach the gospel to them. Suddenly, a wayward woman jumped up on the car with him. Then he jumped off immediately and ran away, before any photographer could take a picture. It was right. But here this woman was kissing Jesus' feet and pouring perfume on them in full view of all the dinner guests. Yet Jesus didn't mind. Jesus was sure to be misunderstood and criticized. Yet he allowed her to express her affection to the full. Jesus welcomes with compassion sinners who come to him, like the father of the prodigal son (Lk 15:20). Everyone else despised this woman, but Jesus did not. Jesus accepted her broken and contrite heart. Psalm 51:17 says, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."

Third, Jesus teaches Simon the grace of God (39-47).

The meeting between Jesus and the woman was most beautiful. Through her sincere repentance and Jesus' embracing love, they formed a heart-to-heart relationship. But the host of the dinner party, Simon the Pharisee, did not understand what was going on. When he saw it, he 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" (39). It was a typical Pharisee mentality: Public sinners were to be shunned, like men with leprosy. The Pharisees did not know how to open the door to the

kingdom of God. They knew well how to isolate people, cut them off, and despise them. When Jesus did not act like a Pharisee, Simon doubted Jesus' spirituality. Simon spoke about this to himself. Nevertheless, Jesus answered him.

Jesus said, "Simon, I have something to tell you" (40). At Jesus' words, silence must have fallen upon the dinner guests. They were all eager to hear what Jesus would say. It was customary for an invited celebrity to pay his host rich compliments and to grace his dinner party with eloquent speech and fine rhetoric. Many may have thought Jesus would compliment Simon for his spectacular dinner party. Simon said, "Tell me, teacher." Then Jesus told him a parable.

Look at verses 41-42. "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Here Jesus spoke in terms of money, a subject in which Simon was probably always interested. A denarii was about a day's wages. In contemporary terms the men owed the moneylender about \$50,000 and \$5,000 respectively. The size of their debts was different. But neither one had the ability to pay back what they owed. So the moneylender canceled the debts of both. Canceling the debts was a gracious act of the moneylender. He could have garnished their wages. He could have sent "repo" men to take away their cars and home entertainment centers. He could have thrown them into prison. Instead, he freely forgave the debts of both.

The moneylender's act describes the grace of Jesus toward sinners. Sin can be paid for only with life-blood (Heb 9:22). No one can redeem his own soul, for even if we give our life-blood to God, it is contaminated with sin. We simply do not have the resources to pay off our debt of sin. But God forgives our sins. To forgive our sins, Jesus, the holy Son of God, paid the price by shedding his own holy blood on the cross. John the Baptist cried out when he saw Jesus, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29). Our debt of sin is forgiven by God's grace alone (Eph 2:8,9). This is God's free gift to men (Ro 6:23b).

Still, sinners like to point out how they are a little better sinner than others. But we are all equally unable to pay our debt of sin; we are saved only by the grace of Jesus. Some people abuse this precious grace as a license to sin (Ro 6:1). Such people are spiritual perverts. They know nothing of God's grace.

At the end of the parable, Jesus asked, "Now which of them will love him more?" This was the point. Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said. Look at verses 44-46. "The he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me 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 did not really see the woman. Instead, he saw his own preconceived idea that she was a sinner. He did not understand her at all. The Pharisees were supposed to be shepherds for suffering people. But without knowing the grace of Jesus they were spiritually blind and cold-hearted.

Jesus came to this Pharisee's house. What wonderful grace for this Pharisee that Jesus came into his house! But Simon thought he was doing Jesus a favor by inviting him to his dinner party. He might have expected Jesus to feel honored. He was indeed spiritually blind. The Son of God came to his house for dinner—and he treated Jesus like a beggar. Simon's mistreatment did not go unnoticed by Jesus. Jesus told Simon fact by fact how cold-hearted he was. On the other hand, the affection of the woman is remarkable.

So Jesus came to a conclusion 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." Jesus did not ignore the fact that the woman had been a great sinner. But when she sincerely repented before Jesus she received the grace of forgiveness of sins. Out of this grace, affection for the Messiah welled up in her soul and led to her lavish expression at the dinner party. According to Jesus' teaching, there is a reciprocal relationship between grace and love. Those who have received more grace love Jesus more.

St. Paul was such a man. In his self-righteousness and ambition, he had persecuted Jesus' people, even approving the stoning of St. Stephen. But the Risen Christ met him on the road to Damascus. Paul found himself a terrible sinner. The Risen Christ forgave all his sins and made him a servant of God (Ac 9:15,16). Then Paul preached the gospel and raised disciples of Jesus throughout the Roman world. The seeds planted by Paul grew into a mighty work of God that conquered the Roman Empire. Even so, Paul never forgot Jesus' grace. He said, "But by the grace

of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me” (1Cor 15:10). Like St. Paul, those who truly know the grace of Jesus work hard for the gospel. They love Jesus with all their heart, mind, soul and strength.

One young man went to Russia as a short-term missionary. While there, he was seduced by a wayward woman. His sin and mistake was obvious. But his shepherd helped him to come to Jesus by faith through sharing his Bible testimony at every Friday leaders’ meeting. This was in the midst of demanding Ph.D. study and feeding twelve sheep per week. He also translated Luke’s gospel messages into Russian every week. Sometimes he cried because it was not easy. But his tears were like those of the woman in this passage; they were tears of repentance. He obtained the grace of forgiveness of sins from Jesus by faith. He did not abuse this grace. He treasured this grace. So he worked hard for the glory of God. He became a professor-shepherd for one university and a powerful Bible speaker. Perhaps he received more grace than others. But he also loved Jesus more than others. If you have a perverted concept of Jesus’ grace that makes you a couch potato, may God help you repent and receive the grace of Jesus that leads you to love Jesus with all your heart, mind, soul and strength.

In light of verse 47, Simon’s cold heart was the evidence that he did not know Jesus’ grace. He did not even know that he was a sinner. But he was a terrible sinner. He should have been a shepherd. But he was cold-hearted, self-righteous and full of condemnation. He did the opposite of what God wanted him to do. Moreover, in his stupendous arrogance, he exalted himself above the Son of God. The woman was morally reprehensible, to be sure. But Simon’s spiritual arrogance may have been worse in the sight of God. Still, Jesus did not condemn him. Jesus told him a parable in understatement to help him open his spiritual eyes and repent his sins. Jesus really wanted him to know the grace of God and then the shepherd heart of God. In the same way, Jesus wants us to know his grace and have a shepherd’s heart for young American women. Then he will bless “HNW” ministry abundantly.

Fourth, go in peace (48-50).

Look at verse 48. “Then Jesus said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’” Jesus had already accepted the woman’s repentant heart. But it was very important that he tell her explicitly, “Your sins are forgiven.” This was Jesus’ declaration as the Everlasting Judge that her sins had been paid for. 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 her salvation. Jesus’ grace is always available. But only those who claim this grace by faith receive salvation. Jesus gave her true peace in her soul. She was right with God. She had a personal relationship with Jesus. She had become a princess in the heavenly kingdom.

In this passage we learn that we can come to Jesus by faith. Jesus does not despise our broken and contrite hearts. Jesus accepts our repentance and gives us the grace of forgiveness of sins. This grace is freely given. But it is most costly and precious. It leads us to love Jesus with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. May Jesus grant each of us the grace of forgiveness of sins that produces love in our souls.