

THE GREAT LOVE OF A SINFUL WOMAN

Luke 7:36-50

Key Verse 7:47

Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.”

The 2023 International Summer Bible Conference will be held at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign from August 3-6 next year. Do you remember the theme of the conference? It is “His Glory,” which is the glory of the one and only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ (Jn 1:14). Our main prayer topic is to see the glory of Jesus through his salvation ministry, suffering and death on the cross, resurrection, and second coming. We desire to experience the presence of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit throughout the preparation of the conference from now on. Do you know what will happen if we see the glory of God and our Lord Jesus Christ? We will be filled with the Spirit of God through the forgiveness of our sins and the love of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our spirits will be renewed and our love for Jesus will be restored. We will love Jesus more and more and can serve Jesus with great joy and happiness. Do you want to experience His Glory?

Today we will meet a woman who experienced the love of the forgiveness of Jesus and who expressed her love for Jesus wholeheartedly. Jesus received her love very mindfully to heal her wounded heart. On the other hand, the Pharisee Simon didn't love Jesus because he hadn't been forgiven of his sins. Jesus taught that the more we have been forgiven, the more we love Jesus. How much do you love Jesus? I pray that we can learn the secret of loving Jesus more through today's message.

One of the Pharisees named Simon invited Jesus to have dinner with him (36a, 40). The Pharisees were the largest and most important religious group of Israel in Jesus' time. Most of them opposed Jesus because he refused to accept their interpretations of the oral law. Then, why did the Pharisee Simon invite Jesus to have dinner with him? It doesn't seem that he was looking for any issues to accuse of Jesus because we don't see any arguments between Jesus and Simon. Also, it seems that he didn't respect Jesus much because he didn't receive Jesus with basic etiquettes for honorable guests. Maybe he was curious of Jesus because Jesus taught the word of God with authority and performed many miracles and signs. Maybe he wanted to show off himself by having dinner with Jesus who was getting more popular in his town. Anyway, we can see that the Pharisee Simon didn't know that Jesus was the Son of God and the promised Messiah.

Jesus accepted his invitation willingly, as he was open to everyone to announce the good news to. In fact, Jesus accepted other invitations to eat with Pharisees (11:37; 14:1). Jesus went

to the Pharisee Simon's house and reclined at the table. To recline at the table was a Greek custom which the Jews adopted for festive banquets. Those who were at a banquet reclined at the table with their heads toward the table and their feet away from the table. Jesus lay supported on his left arm with his head turned towards the table, upon a pillow, and his bare feet were turned toward where the attendants stood.

While Jesus was having dinner with the Pharisee Simon, an unexpected thing happened. A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume (37). It was such an amazing event that the author Luke exclaimed saying, "And behold (καὶ ἰδοὺ) (ESV)" at the beginning of the story. Why was it so amazing that the woman came to Jesus? The Bible describes that she lived a sinful life, which means that people of the town knew that she was a public sinner, which meant a prostitute. We don't know her name. Church tradition has frequently identified her as Mary Magdalene, but there is no biblical ground for this. How could she enter the Pharisee's house? Obviously, she was not invited to the dinner by the Pharisee. But it was a Jewish custom that when a rabbi was invited, all class of people could enter the house to listen to the rabbi's teaching. This explains how she could enter the Pharisee's house. However, it was very difficult for her to come to the house of a Pharisee because she was a public sinner. People would point at her and reject her saying, "Look at her. Why is she here?" Absolutely, she needed a lot of boldness to come to see Jesus. She came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. Alabaster was a fine-grained white gypsum used to make vases and jars. Most spices to produce perfume were imported from Arabia, Africa, India, and Persia. Thus, the cost of perfume was expensive. To preserve the special scents of the perfume, alabaster jars with long necks were sealed at the time the perfume was prepared and then broken just before use.

What did she do then? (v. 38) She stood behind Jesus at his feet and began to weep and weep. She wept uncontrollably, and her tears began to wet the feet of Jesus. Jesus' feet were covered with dust and got messed up with her tears. She wanted to clean them up, but she didn't have any towel. Hence, she began to wipe Jesus' feet with her long hair, which was a symbol of women's glory and beauty. And then, she kissed them and poured perfume on them. The fragrant scent of the perfume scattered around the Pharisee's house. It was a shocking event that caught the attention of all the people who were there to listen to the teaching of Jesus. Why did she weep tears, wipe Jesus' feet with her hair, kiss them, and pour perfume on them? It was an expression of her repentance for her sins. It was an expression of her gratitude for the forgiveness of her sins. It was an expression of her love for Jesus who loved her and forgave her. It was the maximum expression of her repentance, gratitude, and love for Jesus. It was one of the most beautiful events throughout the ministry of Jesus.

What was the reaction of Jesus to the woman's extravagant expression of love? Nothing! Jesus didn't do anything, but just received her expression of love looking at her silently. In fact, it was a very awkward situation for Jesus. Everyone was looking at him and the sinful woman who was weeping tears, wiping his feet with her hair, kissing his feet, and pouring perfume on them. Some people could think that there was something going on between Jesus and the woman. Furthermore, she was a public sinner, a prostitute. One day many years ago when I was eating

lunch with some brothers of the church at a humble café, two ladies sat at the table next to ours. I realized that they were prostitutes by their costumes, and I felt very uncomfortable with that situation. Jesus could've felt uncomfortable with her and said, "What are you doing? Stop it!" or, "It's enough!" But Jesus didn't say anything to her, nor did he stop her. Why? It was because Jesus understood her heart and wounded emotions—her sorrow, agony, frustration, regret, anger, etc. It was because Jesus wanted to heal her by accepting her expression of repentance, gratitude, and love. Jesus understood her love language and received it as it was. Gary Chapman, an American author, wrote a book about 5 love languages, which are: Words of Affirmation, Quality Time, Receiving Gifts, Acts of Service, and Physical Touch.¹ What is your love language? It seems that the woman's love language was physical touch, thus she touched, wiped, and kissed the feet of Jesus. Jesus received her expression of love and loved her as her Savior and Creator. Jesus understands our hearts and emotions and receives us as we are. It is a great blessing for us to know Jesus, our Savior, who is full of love and grace. Since I have meditated on this passage, a worship song has been coming to my mind: (YouTube Video: Thank You, Jesus, for loving me.) "Thank You, Jesus / Thank You, Jesus / Thank You, Lord, / for loving me // Thank You, Jesus / Thank You, Jesus / Thank You, Lord, / for loving me // You went to Calvary / And there You died for me / Thank you, Lord, / for loving me // You went to Calvary / And there you died for me / Thank you, Lord, / for loving me." Thank you, Jesus for loving us and dying on the cross for our sins!

To Jesus, her actions were a beautiful expression of love. However, many people felt offended by the presence and action of the sinful woman. Especially, the host, the Pharisee Simon, didn't like it at all. He felt that the sinful woman ruined his banquet. Moreover, he couldn't accept that Jesus didn't reject her filthy actions. He couldn't understand why Jesus didn't say to her anything but let her touch him. He began to doubt the spirituality of Jesus. He thought that Jesus didn't have spiritual discernment. Hence, 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). He thought that he was clean while the woman was unclean. He thought that her dirty sins could contaminate Jesus, himself, and others by touching them. He didn't see the repentance of the woman, but judged her for her past life. He didn't understand her, and didn't even try to understand her. He didn't know the heart of Jesus. He didn't have the heart of God even though he was a religious leader.

Jesus read his mind and told him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." Simon responded, "Tell me, teacher." Jesus told him a parable of two debtors. (vv. 41-42) Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. One denarius was the usual daily wage of a day laborer. The minimum wage of the State of Illinois is currently \$12 per hour and a little higher in Chicago. Usually, one laborer works 8 hours a day. So, the minimum daily wage would be around \$100. Therefore, five hundred denarii would be equivalent to \$ 50,000, while fifty denarii would be equivalent to \$ 5,000. The two debtors didn't have the money to pay him back, so the moneylender forgave the debts of both. Is it not amazing? Jesus

¹ Gary Chapman, *The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love That Lasts* (Chicago, IL: Northfield Publishing, 1992).

asked Simon the Pharisee, “Now which of them will love him more?” Imagine that you have a student loan of \$ 50,000 and you don’t have money to pay it off and you lost your job. You are very worried about your loan, but suddenly the government declared the cancellation of all student loans. Your \$ 50,000 student loan was cancelled by the grace of the government. Will you thank the President Joe Biden or not? On the other hand, your friend had a student loan of \$ 5,000 because he had already paid \$45,000 back. His debt of \$ 5,000 was also cancelled by the government declaration. He is happy, but not so much as you are. The Pharisee Simon replied, “I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.” His answer was right, but it seems that he didn’t like the question of Jesus. He thought why did Jesus tell him such an absurd parable.

Then, Jesus told him the meaning of the parable of two debtors. “Do you see this 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” (44-46). It was a Jewish etiquette that the host of a banquet offered his honorable guest water for his feet, a kiss on the cheek, and a drop of oil on his head. However, Simon didn’t offer any of these to Jesus because he didn’t consider Jesus to be an honorable guest. He didn’t know who Jesus was nor did he have a personal relationship with Jesus. On the contrary, the woman knew exactly that Jesus was her Lord and Savior. She had a deep and personal relationship with Jesus. Hence, she wet Jesus’ feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. She didn’t stop kissing his feet and poured expensive perfume on his feet. She gave her heart and love to Jesus.

What made Simon and the woman act differently toward Jesus? Jesus told Simon the answer to this question. “Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little” (47). The woman showed her great love to Jesus because her many sins had been forgiven, while Simon didn’t love Jesus because his sins had not been forgiven. We can suppose that she had a prior experience of forgiveness before coming to the Pharisee’s house to meet Jesus. Through the word of Jesus, we can see a clear relationship between forgiveness and love. The more we have been forgiven from Jesus, the more we love Jesus. This doesn’t mean we should sin more to know Jesus’ love more. It means we must realize the depth of our sinfulness and his amazing grace. To be forgiven by Jesus means to be released from the eternal judgment of God. We should be condemned by God due to our sins. However, Jesus was condemned and died on the cross in our place. He prayed on the cross saying, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk 23:34a) and thus he opened the way of forgiveness to us. (1Jn 1:9) Therefore, we can be forgiven by the precious blood of Jesus when we confess our sins (1 Jn 1:9). But we should remember that Jesus paid the cost for our sins with his life. Therefore, forgiveness is the maximum expression of the love of Jesus for us. Jesus loved us before we loved Him. 1 John 4:10 says, “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” To be forgiven by Jesus means to be loved by Jesus. Because she was loved by Jesus through the forgiveness of her many sins, she loved Jesus greatly. Because we were loved greatly by Jesus who laid down his life for us, we can love Jesus greatly with all our hearts.

Some may say that the woman was a great sinner while the Pharisee Simon was a less sinner because he had lived keeping the laws of God. Is it true? No! While the woman was a public sinner, the Pharisee was a hidden sinner. In fact, there is no greater sinner or less sinner from the point of view of God because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Ro 3:23). It is not a matter of how much we committed sins against God, but a matter of how much we recognize our sins before the presence of God. When we are in front of God who is holy and glorious, we can clearly see our dirty sins and realize that we are terrible sinners. The prophet Isaiah thought that he was righteous and complained of God and his people. But when he saw the glorious presence of God, he was terrified of his sins saying, "Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty" (Is 6:5).

If you feel that the forgiveness of Jesus has not been great for you, it is because you haven't known personally who Jesus is and your personal relationship with Jesus is not deep. If you feel that you don't love Jesus passionately like the woman did, it is because you haven't experienced the passionate love of the forgiveness of Jesus. If you are not devoted to serve Jesus wholeheartedly, it is because you have lost the love of the forgiveness of Jesus in your life. Therefore, we need to experience the love of the forgiveness of Jesus more deeply and personally if we want to love Jesus more. Why should we love Jesus? This is a very fundamental question. We should love Jesus because Jesus is our Creator and Savior. We should love Jesus because we were created to love and worship Jesus, which is the original meaning of our existence. Therefore, when we love Jesus, we can find the true meaning of our lives and be happy and joyful. When we love Jesus, our lives can be fruitful for the glory of God.

Then, how can we experience the love of the forgiveness of Jesus deeply? We need to be in the presence of God in the Spirit and in truth, which is our true worship. We can have fellowship with the Spirit of God through prayers, reading and meditating on the word of God, and praising the Lord. We can have this precious time individually and communally. Our faith community offers early morning prayer, Daily Bread, Bible readings, Bible studies, praise and worship night, Sunday worship service and fellowship, and other opportunities so that we can meet Jesus personally and experience the love of the forgiveness of our Lord Jesus Christ. When we experience the forgiveness of Jesus deeply, we can serve Jesus wholeheartedly. (Ro 12:1) We will offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God (Ro 12:1). We will feed Jesus' sheep with great joy as Jesus asked us: "Do you love me? Feed my sheep" (Jn 21:17). Our life of faith and mission will not be a burden, but a great joy and happiness for us.

Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven" (48). It was a public declaration of her forgiveness. Because she was a public sinner, it was necessary that Jesus declares her forgiveness publicly. The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" (49) But Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (50).

I was a great sinner who denied the existence of God and opposed those who preached the good news to me. I was very selfish pursuing my success as the prime goal of my life. I was a hypocrite seeking lustful desire secretly. I was arrogant, believing that I could live without God. But Jesus had mercy on me and forgave my many sins with his great love on the cross when I

was a freshman in college. The love of the forgiveness of Jesus changed my life radically. I threw away my human ambition and left everything behind to follow Jesus as a shepherd and missionary. Jesus blessed my life abundantly when I followed him. But I feel that I have forsaken the love I had at first. These days I felt very tired with many things to do and thought that I needed a break. Sometimes, I wanted to live an easygoing life without taking up my cross of mission. But today's message teaches me that I need to meet the presence of God newly, be forgiven of my sins, renew my spirit, and restore my personal relationship with God. May God help to me serve Jesus wholeheartedly as the woman did. May God help each of us to restore our love for Jesus through the forgiveness of our sins. Amen.