

WHOEVER HAS BEEN FORGIVEN MUCH LOVES MUCH

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.”

In today’s passage Jesus accepts an extravagant act of love from a woman who was a notorious sinner. This happened in the home of a Pharisee named Simon where Jesus was a dinner guest. In a sense, it was a scandalous event. Through it, Jesus revealed the raw truth of his forgiving love for sinners. It was not easy for Jesus’ host to accept. So in order to help him, Jesus taught the universal truth about sin and God’s forgiving love. Jesus stresses that when God’s forgiveness touches a sinner’s heart, love sprouts and grows. According to Jesus, whoever has been forgiven much loves much. Love is what God wants most from his people: Love for him and love for others. If we do many great things and have many spiritual gifts, but do not have love, we are nothing. So as God’s children, it is most important for us to grow in love. Let’s ask ourselves, “Am I growing in love?” Today we can learn the secret to loving Jesus passionately.

First, Jesus accepted a sinful woman’s love (36-38). In those days most Pharisees were critical of Jesus. But Simon was different. He had a more favorable view of Jesus. Perhaps he had heard that Jesus was being called a prophet after raising a dead young man to life. He wanted to know more about Jesus. So he invited Jesus to dinner, and Jesus accepted. They were reclining at the table eating delicious food and engaging in lively dinner conversation. Suddenly, a woman interrupted their dinner party. She is described as one who lived a sinful life in that town. Most likely, she was a prostitute. We can guess how this happened. At one time, she must have been a pretty young girl. Perhaps her mother died young and her father, out of anger, spoke hurtful words that wounded her. At a time when she needed to be nurtured, she was abandoned. Longing for a father’s love ached in her soul. In high school she met a boy who seemed to really care about her and made sweet promises. But after taking advantage of her, he abandoned her. Then she hardened her heart. In a rage against men, she decided she would take advantage of men and use their weakness to make money. But it was the devil’s deception. Instead of gaining something, she lost everything. Now, her life was wasted. Regret and shame overwhelmed her. The devil’s torment was unbearable: “You are no good. No one wants you. You should just end your life.” One day, she heard about Jesus. She heard how he had healed the sick, raised the dead, and forgiven sins. She heard him called the “friend of sinners.” Suddenly, hope came alive in

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her heart. She dared to believe that Jesus would forgive her sins. So she was compelled to go to him. She was not welcome at the Pharisee's house, but it did not matter to her. She just went in. Though people looked disapprovingly, she fixed her eyes on Jesus and went to him. It was not to get something from him, but just to be near him, and to give him something that was precious to her.

As she stood behind him, tears began to well up in her eyes and fall upon Jesus' feet. They were tears of repentance: she was genuinely sorry for her sins. They were tears of thanksgiving that God had sent the Messiah by his grace. They were tears of love that came when she realized that God loved her. In the presence of Jesus, her soul found release and she tasted deep freedom. She felt Jesus' acceptance and understanding. She felt Jesus' love, a love that circulated from his heart to hers; it was as real as the air she breathed. She wept so much that her tears covered Jesus' feet and began to mix with the dust, making a mess. She wanted to clean his feet. But there was no towel. So she used her hair, her glory, as a towel. Then she kissed his feet again and again and again, and poured perfume on them. This was her love language. She was pouring herself out at Jesus' feet in surrender, thanksgiving and wholehearted love. As the aroma of the perfume spread throughout the house, it carried with it the fragrance of her faith and love.

How did Jesus respond? It would be costly for Jesus to accept this woman's act. It would immediately bring into question his integrity. It would totally disrupt the dinner party. Jesus could have said, "What are you doing? That's enough. Stop!" But Jesus did not stop her. Jesus accepted her act; it meant Jesus accepted her as she was. No one else respected or valued her; they thought of her like garbage. But Jesus treasured her. Jesus knew very well that she was a sinful woman. But Jesus was not ashamed of her. Rather, Jesus saw her faith and love—her inner beauty—and cherished her as a daughter of God. This is how Jesus treats anyone who comes to him by faith, no matter how terrible their sins. In John's gospel, Jesus said, "**All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away**" (Jn 6:37). When a thief on a cross sincerely repented and asked mercy, Jesus said, "**Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise**" (Lk 23:43). A contemporary sinful woman, Annie Lobert, cried, "Jesus save me!" Then Jesus embraced her with his love and pulled her out of the dark pit. Jesus welcomed her as a daughter of God.¹

¹ <http://www.iamsecond.com/seconds/annie-lobert/>

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Yet we must know that in order to associate with the sinful woman and welcome her, Jesus had to pay a cost. Jesus was despised and judged by his host. This was just the beginning. Ultimately, Jesus would be despised and rejected and killed on the cross, shedding his blood. Though Jesus is the holy Son of God, the most precious treasure in all the universe, God allowed him to be broken and for his blood to be poured out on the cross. God did this to demonstrate to the whole world how much he loves us. Because he first loved us, we can love him and come to him by faith. Let's believe God's love and Jesus' acceptance as the woman did, and come to him by faith.

Second, Jesus defended and blessed the woman (39-50). After the woman's extravagant expression of love, there were two responses. Simon the Pharisee became critical. On the other hand, Jesus defended and blessed the woman. Simon 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). Simon judged the woman as a sinner, and he judged Jesus for having no spiritual discernment. Simon implied that Jesus had now become unclean by letting an unclean woman touch him. Simon totally misunderstood the woman. What was worse, he had no idea who Jesus was.

Simon's loveless legalism was a danger to the woman and to himself. In that moment, when the woman was so vulnerable, Jesus acted to defend her and to help Simon. Jesus knew Simon's thoughts and his heart. Jesus did not rebuke him directly, but engaged in a rhetorical conversation, which a Pharisee would relate to. **Jesus said, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," Simon said.** Simon may have expected a compliment on his dinner party. But Jesus began to tell a story of two people and a moneylender. One of them owed the moneylender five hundred denarii, about \$50,000 today. The other owed the moneylender fifty denarii, about \$5,000. Neither of them had the money to pay him back. Many of us can understand how burdened the debtors were. Out of great compassion, the moneylender forgave the debts of both. It was like instantly cancelling all student loans and home mortgages. What a wonderful moneylender! What a great day for the debtors. They must have had a party to celebrate.

Now, among the two forgiven debtors, which would be more grateful? Which would love the moneylender more? This was Jesus' question to Simon. Simon answered, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven." Jesus complimented him, "Simon, you have judged correctly." Simon might have felt good about himself. Then Jesus came to the point. He wanted to set Simon free

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from his self-righteousness and prejudice. He wanted to open Simon's eyes to the truth. In order to do so, he contrasted the woman's love for him with Simon's. In that situation, it was basic etiquette for a host to welcome guests by giving water to wash their feet, greeting them with a kiss on the cheek, and putting oil on their heads to express respect and courtesy. But Simon neglected all of these expressions. On the other hand, the woman wet Jesus' feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair and did not stop kissing them. Then she poured expensive perfume on Jesus' feet. Jesus concluded: **"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 was not forgiven because of her love. Her love was her response to the forgiveness she had already received.

In Jesus' story we find the gospel truth. The generous moneylender refers to God, the debtors to people, and debt to sin. The amount of debt may differ from person to person, but the common factor is that no one can repay it. Rather, their debt increases day by day, and they feel mounting pressure and become more and more helpless and frustrated. They may find some temporary comfort in comparing themselves to greater debtors, like Simon did when he compared himself to the woman. But this ignores the more important truth that he had a debt of sin to God that he could never repay. Comparing ourselves with others is like taking a drug that makes us feel good for a short time, but does nothing to remedy our illness.

To God, human beings are all terrible sinners, and there is not much difference. To God, our righteous acts are like filthy rags (Isa 64:6). So to God, to compare our righteous acts with others is foolish and arrogant. It offends God, because it ignores God's righteousness through Christ and seeks to establish our own (Ro 10:3-4). Then what should we do? We need to stand before God and realize how terrible our own sins are. Actually, we cannot imagine how great our debt of sin is. In one parable, Jesus compares a sinner's debt to 10,000 talents. This would be 200,000 years of work, or about 10 billion dollars. It is impossible for anyone to repay. But God, in his great mercy, cancelled our debts through Jesus' death on the cross. God set us free from the pressure of our debt of sin. This is why Apostle Paul cried out, **"What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!"** (Ro 7:25) Then he declared, **"There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"** (Ro 8:1). As the hymn says, "Jesus paid it all. All to him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain. He washed it white as snow."

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When we repent our sins and receive God's forgiveness, love for Jesus begins to grow in our hearts. As it does, we begin to accept others as they are and love them. We practice forgiveness. As new believers, passion for Jesus is usually very strong. But as time goes by, it wanes. Reality is hard; expectations are not met; then love for Jesus and others grows cold. I remember how passionate I was for Jesus when I was younger. I left my home in Oregon and a career in business, and moved to the foreign land of Chicago. Yet I was so overjoyed to teach the Bible to students; all that mattered to me was to have twelve Bible studies weekly. When one student responded well, I was happy for a month. If I measured this with a love thermometer, it was over 100 degrees, perhaps breaking the thermometer. But as time has passed and I have gone through hardships, made mistakes in my passion, and don't see the result I expected, that love has waned to 90 degrees and then to 80, and sometimes lower. I acknowledge that my love for Christ and passion needs to be stirred up newly. Perhaps we all need to examine ourselves and measure our degree of love for Jesus.

When we realize that our love has grown cold, what should we do? Shall we try to stir up our passion? That can be short-lived and leave us more tired than before. Instead, we need to have a deeper realization of God's grace. We need to stand before God and recognize that our sin has increased, but his grace has also increased. The cross chart² may help us. When we are born again, we realize that we are sinners, God is holy, and only Jesus' grace saves us. We are right with God and we are happy. But God wants us to grow in understanding him and ourselves. So he helps us step by step to see his great holiness and our own sinfulness, especially as we listen to his words in the Bible. As we come to know our sin more deeply and his grace more fully, love grows in our hearts. As we realize we are forgiven much, we love much. One young lady came to recognize her sin more deeply last year. At the same time, she cried out to Jesus for his grace and mercy. She found his grace covered over all her sins and the fruit of love for Jesus in her life is clearly evident. We do not need to commit sin to realize God's grace. We have already committed enough sin (1Pe 4:3). We just need to be aware of it. When we are, we can ask God's mercy and receive forgiveness. Then God's grace abounds in our hearts and we can renew our love for Jesus and others. This is why we need deep and regular Bible study. It helps us to recognize God's presence and convicts us of our sins, so that we can repent and receive forgiveness. Through deep Bible study we can restore our first love for Jesus. Then the love thermometer will go up once again.

² Concept by Dr. Richard Lovelace (*Renewal as a Way of Life*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1985, pg. 162)

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When we look at the church in Ephesus in Revelation 2, we find that they had many good things which Jesus acknowledged: good deeds, hard work, perseverance, intolerance of wickedness, renouncing false prophets, enduring hardships for Jesus' name, and not growing weary. And yet Jesus held one thing against them: **“You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come and remove the lampstand from its place”** (Rev 2:1-5). Jesus wants us to repent sincerely and restore our first love so that we may love him fervently and also love others. When his love burns at full power in our hearts it will ignite a revival among us. When his love circulates in its power, we will see a great increase in our midst. Lord, restore my first love, and our first love through deep Bible study and repentance before your word.

After defending the woman and helping Simon, Jesus blessed the woman. He said to her, **“Your sins are forgiven”** (48). This declaration echoed throughout heaven and earth. It was God's declaration that this woman was forgiven by God and accepted as his child. It announced her righteousness by faith in Jesus alone. If anyone wanted to condemn her and criticize her, they would be arguing with the Almighty God who justified her. The other guests were upset, but Jesus did not mind. He blessed her: **“Your faith has saved you; go in peace”** (49-50). This peace comes from the forgiveness of sins. It is like a deeply embedded treasure within our souls. No one can take it away. No matter how difficult and challenging life becomes, this peace guards our hearts and minds.

Let's come to Jesus as we are, and ask him to forgive our sins and renew his grace in our hearts. Then love will overflow in our hearts and the love thermometer can explode once again.