

## A Sinful Woman Forgiven Luke 7:36-50

Opener: Y'all ever get calls for student loans? They never stop. (Dad and telemarketer) "I'm eating with my family but if you give me your number, I'll be happy to call you back while you're eating with yours." We don't like someone barging in while we're eating a meal with someone. About to look at someone who comes to Jesus during a meal who is *not* an interruption. In fact, it's interesting to note that the woman in this encounter never even speaks a word. But her faith, and humility and Jesus response teach us so much about the implications of the Gospel for our lives.

Set the scene: Jesus is at a guy named Simon's house. He's a Pharisee. You'll remember from last week Pharisees were a powerful religious party who were characterized by strict obedience to the religious law and rituals and a holier than thou attitude. So, Jesus is hanging out this Pharisee's house. And 37 says, "Behold—get ready— a woman of the city, a sinner" comes in. This wouldn't be like someone randomly showing up to your house. It was normal if you were having a celebratory feast at your house to leave the doors open so that people could come in and see what was going on. It's not *that* someone came in but *who* came in—a sinner. When the Gospels call a group of people sinners, it's referring to more than the fact that they sin. To be noted as a "sinner" meant that you either lived an openly sinful lifestyle, drunkard, thief, or were unfaithful to your spouse or had a questionable profession like a tax collector or fortune teller or a prostitute—the traditional view here. Whatever it is, her sin is public knowledge and it's what she's known by.

So she comes in and she's got this alabaster flask filled of ointment vs 38 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. Apparently, at some point before this, this woman had heard about Jesus and received the grace and forgiveness he offers—maybe it was the paralytic. Either way she comes and offers this raw display of love and gratitude. To say this was undignified would be an understatement. This isn't sniffing... this a good old-fashioned ugly cry right here—like where you watched yourself cry in the mirror. The word "wet" here is used in other places for rain showers. The word for kissing here means to kiss repeatedly or fervently—same word used to describe how the father kisses the prodigal son when he returns. She's put this oil on his feet, she's touched him which would make him unclean, and I don't know if she didn't plan but doesn't have a washcloth so she takes her down and wipes his dirty feet with it. For a woman to take her hair down in public was a huge no no. And it's in front of everyone.

He has no compassion, no lump in his throat. He wonders if Jesus is really a prophet. His response is so cold and detached: 39 [Simon] 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." Apparently, a real prophet wouldn't allow himself to be touched by a sinner like this. And like he did in our story last week, Jesus perceives his thoughts 40 "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher." Tells a parable about two guys who owed money to a lender. One owed 500 days worth of wages and the other owed 50. When neither could pay, he canceled their debts. And in vs 42 Jesus asks Simon—Now which of them will love him more? 43 Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." The person who has been forgiven a huge debt will show a kind of love for the lender that the person forgiven of a small debt will not. The person who's been forgiven little may show appreciation, but the person forgiven much will show adoration—

which is exactly Jesus' point here. 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. 45 You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. 46 You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. 47 Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." 48 And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." 49 Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" 50 And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." Can you just imagine what amazing moment this must be for this woman. She's known publicly for her sin—whatever it is. Comes into a room of religious elites looking down on her bc she's that sort of woman. Can you sense the shame? It's embarrassing enough going in there and crying loudly and having everyone look at me how much more embarrassing will it be if he says, "His grace isn't for people like me."

Imagine how unbelievably freeing it would be to see Jesus turn away from the table, look you in the eye, and praise your love for him in front of everyone. To hear Jesus say, in front of the judgmental Pharisees, that your love for him has surpassed theirs, that you have been associated with shame, are putting to shame the religious elite by your devotion and service—to hear in front of everyone on the lips of Jesus himself—your sins, which are many—are forgiven and that you divine permission to go in peace. I came for people like you. Luther said, "When Satan tells me I am a sinner he comforts me immeasurably, since Christ died for sinners." No matter what you've done, how far out of bounds you've moved for how long, God's grace is greater than your failure, and his willingness to give grace is greater than your capacity to mess things up. What a powerful story. 5 Observations: Two kinds of Love, Self-Perception, Service, Identity, Lostness.

**Pray.**

### Two Kinds of Love

My entire life I hadn't seen two kinds of love in this story. I saw one. I think most of us see this story about Jesus loving a sinful woman and laying the smackdown on the Pharisee. But I don't think that's quite right. It's true that Jesus is showing incredible tenderness and love to this woman but realize that she knows the depth of her sin, and she's clinging to Christ as her only hope—and for people like Jesus love takes the shape of mercy and compassion.

But what about people who have yet to see their sin? What about people like Simon? Does Jesus not care them? Does he just discard them and move on to an easier save? No, what does he do here? In a creative, respectful manner, Jesus tells Simon a story to help him realize that he has sin in his life, that he doesn't see. He has a skewed self-perception. So, Jesus affirms the woman with a reminder of the forgiveness of her sin and he makes a genuine effort to show Simon his sin. My question is this—which one of them is Jesus loving in that moment? Both. This is not a story about Jesus loving one person and not the other. Jesus cares about both people. But his love to each person looks different because they're at different places with their sin. Which means two things for us:

God shows his love for me when he reveals my sin. If your understanding of God's love stops at affirmation, then you'll miss it half the time. It is always God's grace when I see my sin. When the Psalmist says in Ps. 139 "Search my heart...and see if there's anything offensive in me." He's saying "love me." Second part of loving others fully is humbly, respectfully trying to help them see their sin. Said differently we are called to love the sinful woman and the Pharisee among us. We're called to love the people God sets in front of us—we can't dismiss the Pharisee among us. If you're not willing to love the Pharisee—help people see their sin—then you only love half the team. God allows you to see someone's sin? To talk about it? Or help them with it? God's let's you see that so that you can be an agent of rescue to them! Sure it's difficult. Don't be rude be humble. Be gentle. Don't let it be said that everyone always liked you

because you never had the courage to love them... we love people when we remind them of the Gospel and we love them when we help them see their sin. And if people don't see their sin not only is it dangerous but they'll have very skewed self-perception...

### Two Kinds of Self-Perception

In the parable Jesus tells Simon, Jesus is making the point that our love for him is in proportion to our awareness of how sinful we are. If you don't think you've been forgiven of that much, your love for the forgiver will be minimal. It's only when you see how sinful you are that you'll be filled with great love for the one who's forgiven it. This is why we talk about sin at NCC. People say "Don't talk about that" don't you want people to love Jesus? Yes. And according to Jesus a key ingredient in loving him is realizing the gravity of the sin he's saved you from. If you don't look at your sin, you won't love your Savior. And one of the reasons it's so hard for us to feel the weight of our sin we measure our sinfulness like this Pharisee—in comparison to others. And when you do, you can always find someone who's doing worse and feel good about it. I'm not perfect, but I'm not like that either.

But that's measuring with the wrong ruler. Rom 3:23 says all have sinned and fallen short of—not a community standard—but the glory of God. God's holiness is the standard against which we measure our sinfulness. Not other sinners. Now this doesn't mean everyone is equally sinful—that's not true. In fact the parable even accommodates that by presenting people with different debts. But when we measure our sinfulness against the standard of God's holiness, the differences between us are obsolete in light of how far all of us fall short of God's glory. Graphic.

Everyone isn't equally sinful, but everyone is equally desperate. And if try to measure how sinful you are by looking around you won't feel that desperation—you may feel a sense of achievement. But when you focus on how far short you fall then you're driven to see how much mercy you've received. And according to Jesus without that realization—without seeing how much you've been forgiven, you won't love much. Which leads to number 3...

### Two Kinds of Service

One thing we notice about this scene is how utterly minimal and casual Simon's hospitality is. He's had him over, presumably there's food and drink. But for Simon Jesus is just another guest: nothing distinct about the way he serves Jesus compared to anyone else. But the woman—the one who knows how sinful she is and how much she's been forgiven—gives him VIP treatment and Jesus compares and contrasts the way both Simon and woman have treated him with a line by line rundown. 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. 45 You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. 46 You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. That is love for Jesus. Jesus calls it "much love" and this "much love" is what should characterize our love. What does much love involve?

**(1) Urgency**—this couldn't wait. Serving Jesus, being with him focusing on him, couldn't wait till the meal was over, till work slowed down, till the sports season was over, till finances improved, till health got better. But if that's our attitude then it shows that we don't see our need or his worth: "Once let him see his sin and he must see his savior. He feels stricken with a deadly disease, and nothing will satisfy him but the great Physician. He hungers and thirsts, and he must have nothing less than the bread of life." (Ryle) And I can't help but wonder how many of us are going to get serious about serving and living for Jesus

when the next season of life gets comes around. Much love for Jesus says my need him is so great, and he is so worthy, the only time to devote my everything to him is now

**(2) Sacrifice**—this alabaster jar of ointment—very expensive. If it was nard like Mary uses when she anoints Jesus it could be worth up to the modern equivalent of 50,000 dollars today. If she was a prostitute—which again we don't know for sure—this was certainly something she would use to render herself attractive—a crucial business expense. And she takes this extremely expensive ointment and pours it out on Jesus feet. Why is she willing to pour out her most valuable possession—because she has a better treasure and he's sitting right in front of her and he is worth sacrificing everything for—today. If she were to lose everything and get him, that would be gain. I'd simply ask, when it comes to serving the Lord, is there something you're not willing to let go of in order to do it? I would show my love in service to him but... Time? Energy? Comfort?

Because I sense that so many of us are tempted to love Jesus like Simon and less like this woman. A service to Jesus with no sacrifice, no tears, no risk of reputation, minimal effort all for a casual routine relationship with Jesus. We're happy to have him for a meal and appreciate him, rather than fall on our faces and adore him—especially if it makes us look weird. I constantly feel like people ask what's the minimum I can do to have Jesus at my table? If that's our posture, it hardly demonstrates our love for him? Could you define your love and service to God and minimalistic? He deserves a blank check with our lives because he's worthy—and he's worthy *today*...love for God characterized not by casual routine minimal, but urgency and sacrifice.. which leads to number 4

### Two Kinds of Identity

Now remember, Pharisees prided themselves on their religious performance and impressive moral devotion and looked down on people without the same track record. And you can see this in Simon's thought process. When he sees Jesus letting this woman touch him he says to himself in vs 39, **"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."** It's not like Simon and this woman have a relationship and really knows her, he knows what she's done and for Simon that failure defines what sort of woman she is. For Simon, she's just the sum of her failures. You ever done this to someone? Pick out someone's failure and decide they're just "that sort of person".

Jesus is about to destroy that identity paradigm. He asks a question that's much deeper than it appears on the surface, as all this is happening Jesus responds to Simon's thoughts and says, **"Do you see this woman?"** Now obviously he sees this woman—but Jesus pointing out that Simon doesn't see who she is, he can only see what she's done. For Simon she is her failure. But in the Gospel my identity isn't defined by what I've done. My identity is defined by what's been done for me. My sense of value is grounded is someone's else's performance and achievements on my behalf—and it's on that basis that I can have forgiveness and peace. Because my life is hidden in Christ. This woman's a new creation—new hopes, new future, new treasure. Jesus could have easily responded. Simon the problem isn't that I don't know who this woman is, but that you don't. Who is this woman? Forgiven, redeemed, loved, adopted daughter, sin forgiven, shame removed, inheriting the world, reigning with me. She's mine. Would you dare define my daughter by her failure when I've come to define her by my love.

You see Simon struggled with what I've struggled with my whole life—my value is only as good as my performance and achievements—don't underachieve, don't fall short you don't want to be that "sort of person" just sort of a mumbling stumbling mess. But I am that sort of person and so are you—it would be embarrassing for everyone to see the sin and shortcomings in your life, your home, certainty in your heart.

And my hope isn't that I can put together a life worthy of God's love—but that I can come to God in someone else's name. On the basis of someone else's performance and achievements. Who came and identified with my weakness so that I might find an identity in a strength that's not my own. Two kinds of love, self-perception, service, identity...

### **Two Kinds of Lostness**

We saw this last week, but it's seen here in even greater focus. These two individuals represent the two ways to be lost. The sinful woman's previous lifestyle represents what we typically thinking about when it comes to being lost—someone like the prodigal son who's just doing whatever they want with no desire to serve or love God. And that's definitely someone who's in need forgiveness. Someone who's lost. But there's another way to be lost—a just a popular way—and it's not by going out and doing everything you want, but by buckling down and doing everything you should. This is Simon. Devoted. Keeping the rules. He's not running from God being bad, he's trying to get to God by being good. Which means he's just as those living in rebellion.

You see we're not saved by what we do. When Jesus says 47 **"Her sins which are many are forgiven—for she loved much"** you could get the impression that she's saved because of this impressive display of devotion. You might think if I'm going to be saved, I need to show a similar display. But that's not why. Two reasons: (1) Jesus says very clearly in vs 50, "Your faith has saved you." (2) Think about the parable Jesus tells. The big debt person isn't forgiven because of how much he loves the lender. That would mean the love caused the forgiveness. That's the opposite what the parable is teaching. It's teaching that the love is the result of being forgiven. The lender's big forgiveness produces big love in the person forgiven. Jesus is saying this woman's sins have obviously been forgiven because she loved much. Her love is the evidence of forgiveness. She's not coming in hopes that Jesus will forgive her debt, she's coming in adoration because he already has, through faith.

Maybe you've been casual. Maybe you haven't loved the Pharisee around you. Maybe your love is cold because you're not willing to look at your sin.