**FORGIVEN MUCH, LOVES MUCH**

September 21, 2014

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 devout 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: he who has been forgiven little loves little; he who has been forgiven much loves much. 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.

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.” The scene is in the courtyard of the house of Simon the Pharisee. They say that at that time, rich families built their homes around an open courtyard, in which they formed a hollow square decorated with a flower garden and a beautiful fountain. In such homes many kinds of parties took place. All kinds of people were allowed to come in as observers, while aristocratic people were eating at the table, listening to the wisdom spoken by the guests.

When a guest entered such a house, three things were always done; firstly, the host placed his hand on the guest’s shoulder and gave him the kiss of peace. That would be a mark of respect which was never omitted in the case of a distinguished rabbi. Secondly, the roads were very dusty and so always cool water was poured over the guest’s feet to cleanse and comfort them. Thirdly, either sweet-smelling incense was burned or a drop of perfume of roses was placed on the guest’s head. Jesus arrived at the Pharisees’ home and receives nothing. Simon does not give him a greeting, no water for his feet and no anointing for his head. Everyone present knows that Jesus is being treated rudely.

Look at verse 37a, “When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house…” Though she was a resident of that town, she was looked down upon as a sinner. We are not told what her sin was, but the Bible says here that she had “lived a sinful life.” In the context of those times, this means that she was probably a prostitute or an adulteress, similar to the Samaritan woman of John chapter 4 who had 5 husbands and a roommate, or the woman who was caught in the act of adultery in John chapter 8. We don’t know how she came to live such a sinful lifestyle. Perhaps she was filled with uncontrollable desire to be loved. Most likely, her self-image was tattered, ragged and ruined. She was the continual object of cutting criticism in insults in that town. She had been spat upon and cursed at. She was the example many mothers in that town used to warn their daughters. She was the brunt of nasty jokes. Inwardly, she was broken and bleeding. Her spirit was wounded, with feelings of guilt and self-condemnation. She desperately wanted freedom and forgiveness, but there was no human remedy, no human solution for her wounded soul.

How did she come to Jesus? All the people in the Galilean district had heard that Jesus heals the sick and casts out evil spirits and preaches the good news of the kingdom of God. 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.” (Luke 5:31,32) One day, the woman learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house. But it was a place she was not allowed to enter even as an observer, because only average people were allowed to come in and watch their eating. But something happened in her soul. As soon as the woman heard that Jesus heals the sick and preaches the kingdom of God, her sick soul rejoiced and felt she was healed. As she appeared, some may have gasped, “What is she doing here?” But she did not mind. Anyway she came to Jesus as she was. Her coming to Jesus is comparable to the prodigal son’s returning to his father. And Jesus is comparable to the father who was waiting for his son’s coming at the door every day until very late. Her coming to Jesus just as she was, was a beautiful act of faith. We must come to Jesus just as we are.

When her eyes finally rest on him, the other guest fade into a mist of tears; it suddenly doesn’t matter what these respectable people think about her. All that she sees is Jesus. Look at verse 38. “…and 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 knelt at the feet of Jesus with the perfume she had brought with the purpose of anointing his feet. Then an unexpected complication arose; she was weeping so uncontrollably that her tears began to fall on Jesus’ dusty feet. 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 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. No doubt embarrassed she searches desperately something to wipe the feet of Jesus, but had not come prepared for this. Mortified that her tears had fallen on the feet of Jesus, she took the one thing available to her; she let down her long hair and began to dry his feet. But the more she wiped with her hair, the more tears that fell. She used the water of her tears to wash his feet, something that could hardly have been planned in advance. She then began to kiss his feet. In fact the text uses a verb form which means “to kiss again and again”; she repeatedly kissed his feet. This woman is self-forgetting mess – crying unashamedly, her nose running with weeping, her hair wet with a muddy mixture of tears and dirt.

As the sweet fragrance of her sacrifice fills the room, anyone who was not aware of this woman’s actions, became so. All eyes are on Jesus; what will he do? He doesn’t appear to be either embarrassed or upset at the extravagance of this display of love and devotion. What she did she did remarkably well; she worshiped. This woman’s worship was at great personal cost. It cost the expensive perfume, it cost her the humility to kiss, wash and dry with her hair the dirty feet of the Lord. Perhaps the greatest cost she faced was the scorn and rejection of the self-righteous Pharisee and his dinner guest. No one had invited her. She was not wanted there. She probably would be scorned and she might be thrown out. But none of those things mattered, her desire to see and worship Jesus were greater than her fear. The price that she had to pay may be high, but to her it was worth it.

Simon’s reaction, given in verse 39 reveals much about the condition of his heart. “When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, 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.” In Simon’s mind he was passing judgment. Simon’s reasoning went something like this; If Jesus were a prophet, he would know people’s character. If Jesus knew this woman was a sinner, he would have nothing to do with her. The problem with logic is the same as the problem with computers; your output is only as reliable as your input. Because Simon’s logic was based on false assumptions, it led him to false conclusions.

In verses 40-43, Jesus tells the story to teach Simon that everyone is spiritually in debt which can never be repaid. “There was a certain moneylender who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they could not repay, he freely forgave them both.” Since a denarius was equal to about a day’s wages, 50 denarii equaled about $5,000; and 500 denarii, $50,000. These were incredible debts, considering that the average wages were barely sufficient for survival. And although there is considerable difference in what each man owed, what is important is that neither man was able to pay. But the moneylender in a supreme show of mercy and compassion canceled each man’s debt. Jesus’ question recorded in verse 42 was, “Now which of them will love him more?” The answer was so obvious: Certainly the one that was forgiven ten times as much would have the greater gratitude. The higher the debt, the more the forgiveness cost the moneylender.

The good news is that forgiveness is available to everyone. But forgiveness is not free; forgiveness always cost something. For the moneylender it cost 550 denarii to forgive those that were indebted to him. Forgiveness always cost something. When God said, “I will forgive you,” it cost the life of his only son Jesus on the cross. The sin debt had to be paid. Jesus paid the debt so that we would not have to. The conclusion is clear; Simon as a “high class” sinner had the same problem as the “low class” prostitute; it is only a matter of degrees.

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 cold-hearted. 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 tells Simon that this woman has done for Jesus what he had refused to do. He had purposefully omitted the common courtesies accorded to any honored guest. Jesus chose to overlook Simon’s intended insult because his purpose for being there was not to judge manners but to forgive sin.

Jesus tells Simon in verse 47, “Therefore I say to you, her many sins have been forgiven, for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.” To love because you are forgiven is a natural response to such an undeserved action. The Jerusalem Bible brings out the meaning of Jesus’ words, “For this reason I tell you that her sins, her many sins, must have been forgiven, or she would not have shown such great love.” Then Jesus in verse 48 spoke the words that she had been searching for, waiting to hear, all of her life; “Your sins are forgiven.” In so doing he openly declared that all of her past sins were forgiven. The truly exciting part is that what was true then is still true today. Jesus forgives all those who come to him in faith and repentance. When some people truly met Christ, they would put us to shame in their displays of love and devotion to Jesus. Such people love much because they have been forgiven much. Oliver Avison was a professor at the University of Toronto medical school. He was, at that time, the doctor for the mayor of the city of Toronto. When Horace Underwood, an American missionary, came to Toronto to recruit doctors to serve at the Royal Hospital in Seoul, Avison kept thinking, “Why only young doctors, why not me?” He gave up the privileged position at Toronto, and went to Korea to serve Korean people. He played an important role in building Severance Memorial Hospital, which is part of Yonsei University Health System.

How can we love God much? It is to realize how much debt has been paid. In order to know how much debt has been paid, we need to know how much debt we have. We can know it only when we know the holy God. When we know the holy God, we realize that we have debt which we can never repay. In fact, it is infinite. No matter how much sacrifice, good deeds we do, we cannot repay the debt. It is like -∞+500=-∞; -∞+5,000,000,000=-∞. Simon did not know God. So he did not know that he was the same sinner before God as this woman: morally, ethically and spiritually. There have been many people in history who thanked God for his grace of forgiveness of sin. St. Paul said, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst.” (1 Tim 1:15) When Paul said it, he meant it. He thought that he did not deserve to live in this world anymore because he committed sins against God by persecuting the early Christians. But he could live in this world because of God’s grace. He said, “But by the grace of God I am what I am...” (1 Cor 15:9) The more he knew the holy God, the more he realized he was a sinner; the more he could realize the grace of God. So he loved Jesus more and more; he could love others more and more.

We all want to love God and love others much. The antidote for our being cold-hearted and judgmental is to realize that how much we have been forgiven. For that, we need to know the holy God. When we know the holy God, we know the depth of our sin, and we know the grace of Jesus. May God bless you to know the grace of Jesus and become man and woman of love.