

Sunday, July 16, 2023 | Everyday Disciple

Week 13 | Luke 7:36-50 | "Forgiven to Love"

A couple weeks ago, we grappled with the topic of doubt. Luke showed us that there is a good and wrong way to deal with uncertainty. The good way was how John the Baptist brought his questions to Jesus. The wrong way was how the religious refused to listen to anything that Jesus had to say. Thus, we learned that **honest skepticism is the hallmark of a faithful generation, whereas stubborn cynicism is the hallmark of a faithless generation.**

Today, we'll be looking at another comparison passage. But instead of Luke comparing John the Baptist with a bunch of religious leaders, as in the last passage (cf. 7:18-35), he'll compare a woman with a scandalous reputation to a prominent Jewish leader. And, just like before, rather than the religious elite acting as the example to follow, we'll learn that a forgiven sinner has much to teach us about what it means to love. But, make no mistakes, though these two are drastically different, our narrator is comparing two sinners (overt and covert) who stand equally in need of God's forgiveness. How each sinner responds to Jesus will determine who will leave justified and who will leave condemned.

Luke wants us to notice four characters:

i. A sinful woman (vs. 36-38).

READ: Luke 7:36-38 (ESV)

³⁶One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. ³⁷And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, ³⁸and 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.

Two points of clarification are in order.

Today, dinner parties are private affairs, with only invited guests allowed to participate. Many banquets were public affairs in the first century, often occurring in someone's house or courtyard. Even the widows were purposefully left open so that any passersby

might feel encouraged to stay.¹ So, rather than uninvited guests being a problem, as might be the case today, they were the norm during this time. Thus, we should not think it strange that this woman could attend this dinner.

Second, if you do not know how people dined in first-century Palestine, you might imagine this woman crawling under a table. But, as Luke indicates at the end of verse 36, those at the feast “*reclined*.” This might seem strange to us, living in the 21st century. But this type of dinner was called a triclinium (SHOW PICTURE). Rather than being seated in an upright position, attendees would be reclined on couches with their heads pointed toward the meal and their feet away from the table. As such, people would've used their left elbow to support themselves while using their free right hand to eat.

Though Luke says she was a “sinner,” we're left in the dark about the nature of her sin. Though, as the Pharisee's thoughts indicate, whatever evil she might've been guilty of was known by many. Could she have been a prostitute? Maybe. The point, however, is not her past but her actions. Though many knew her because of her past mistakes, she would be known for her worship of Jesus after this.

First, she brought an “alabaster flask of ointment,” implying it was more than standard olive oil and might better be understood as perfume. Luke tells us that she was also “weeping” to such an extent that “she began to wet his feet with her tears.” And rather than use a rag or even her own clothes, the woman “wiped” Jesus’ feet clean with the “hair of her head.” After that, she “kissed” and “anointed” his feet with the perfume.

ii. A cynical man (vs. 39).

READ: Luke 7:39 (ESV)

³⁹ Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he 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.”

This man can rightly be called a cynic for two reasons:

First, he was unmoved by the woman’s actions. His heart did not break when he saw her tears. He was as impassive as a dead man. All he saw was the scarlet letter. All he saw was her sin. It did not matter what she did or why she did it. This woman was a sinner, and he would not allow her to move him even an inch.

¹ Garland, David E., *Luke, The Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI; Zondervan, 2011), p. 324.

Secondly, only a cynic expects others to act according to their rules. And should someone break those rules, the cynic feels justified and writing that person off. Jesus did not seek this woman out. He did not even acknowledge her. But his character was called into question because he did not refuse this woman's display of thanksgiving.

Cynicism masquerades as wisdom when, in actuality, it is the hallmark of a prideful fool.

iii. A gracious investor (vs. 40-43).

READ: Luke 7:40-43 (ESV)

⁴⁰ And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher." ⁴¹ "A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. 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."

In one sense, the two debtors were in different circumstances. One owed 50 denarii (roughly three months' pay), and the other owed 500 (approximately the equivalent of nearly two years' pay). But in actuality, the two debtors were in the same boat since neither could pay off their debt. In other words, though the degree to which each person was ruined was different, the results would've been the same at the end of the day. Both could've been thrown into debtors' prison or worse.

Now, was Jesus telling this story to teach a financial lesson? No. This was a parable. And all parables are earthly stories with a heavenly meaning. And the heavenly meaning behind this story deals with God's relationship with sinners, and, as such, it blurs the lines between those who would consider themselves sinners and those who would consider themselves to be saints. After all, the "moneylender" in Jesus' story represents God, just as the woman takes the place of the debtor who owed 500 denarii and Simon the Pharisee takes the role of the one who owed 50 denarii. Though some sinners are undoubtedly worse than others, all sinners, great and small, are condemned before a perfect God. We may not be as bad as Hitler, but without God's grace, we deserve the same end as him.

iv. A forgiving Savior (vs. 44-50).

READ: Luke 7:44-50 (ESV)

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."

In a fantastic turn of events, Jesus reveals that the sinful woman played a better host than Simon. And it isn't simply that the woman did what the Pharisee failed to do; it is that the woman did more than was expected.² Indeed, as Jesus demonstrated, Simon judged the speck in the woman's eye when he had a weaver's beam sticking out of his (cf. Lu. 6:37-42). After all, hospitality was (and still is) supreme importance to Middle Eastern sensibilities. To offend one's guest, especially one that you invited, would've been highly criticized and condemned. It would've been a major blunder on par with outright slapping someone in the face.

To be clear, the woman did not act as she did to be forgiven. It was because she was forgiven that she served. As in the parable, so too in this woman's life; forgiveness proceeds acts of love. Should there be any doubt as to this point, Jesus' words, "Your faith has saved you..." should demonstrate that the woman's faith fueled her loving actions.

So, what's the takeaway?

The *depth* to which God has forgiven you should equal the *depth* of your devotion to God.

Faith expresses itself in love, graciousness, and service. Do not be surprised when you learn that those who love the best have experienced God's forgiveness the most. Likewise, faithlessness expresses itself in hate, cynicism, and callousness. Those who love little have been forgiven little. Our devotion is directly proportionate to how much we've been forgiven.

Now, some might say, "I love God." And to them, I would ask, "How does the way you love God compare to the way the sinful woman loved Jesus?" Those who give little to God have likely been forgiven little. They feel no need to serve God because they do not think God has done anything for them. They are self-sufficient legalists justified in their own eyes, unwilling to see their need for God's help.

² Garland (2011), p. 329, quoting Bovon, "The result of the comparison is not: she did what you did not, but rather, she did more than that which you did not do."

The great paradox of the Christian walk is that the longer you walk with God, the more unworthy you feel and the more grateful you become. Why? Because the more you get to know God, the more you begin to realize how ungodly you are and the more you realize how undeserving of God's love you are. Yet, despite your unworthiness, you know that God loves you anyways. You have his unmerited favor not because you are good but because God is good. And so, you feel your heart grow closer to God even though your self-estimation grows less.

Video Description

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Pastor's manuscript can be found here: <https://docdro.id/DkUq8cY>