

Finding love for God and others  
 July 10, 2016  
 Brian R. Wipf

(READ Luke 7:36ff)

This passage speaks powerfully about topics that we've already covered in the Gospel of Luke. The powerful theme of judgmentalism emerges as Simon, the religious snob, sneers self-righteously at the sinful woman. But like Jesus did before, he turns the tables on Simon and shows how the woman is the good example of faith and love and how Simon is on the outside of God's forgiveness and grace.

The theme of salvation and forgiveness are powerfully addressed in this story, too. Luke continues to define salvation primarily as the forgiveness of sins. Jesus said in vs. 48, "And he said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.'" That's salvation; that's the rescue of God. In recent years the church of Jesus Christ has correctly brought up the multiple ways God's saving work found in Christ is necessary. God's salvation does include the healing power of God, the victorious power of God over the schemes of the devil, the comforting work of God tending to our brokenness. But at the core, at the foundation of God's saving work, the forgiveness of God for our sins remains central because our sin is indeed our biggest problem.

But, we've covered that ground already. Instead of talking more about those things, I want to focus on a different theme. We are going to answer this question: where do I get love for God and others?

The more you and I read the scriptures, the more we should feel totally inadequate in our strength, our will and our desire to love like Jesus loves. Just listen to some of the commands of God when it comes to love (I'm paraphrasing a little).

- Don't stop forgiving people who sin against you. Just keep forgiving, 70 times 7; over and over again.
- Don't curse your enemy, pray for them. Give them a cold drink of water when they are thirsty; feed them when they are hungry.
- Go the extra mile, always, for others. Don't just give them your coat; give them your boots, too.

The demands of love found in the scriptures are a constant rebuke of our perceived holiness and godliness. We're constantly reminded in God's word that a right evaluation of our standards of love fall short of God's standard. We constantly need his help to love well.

But we know this experientially, too. How many times have you noticed your failure in loving people well? I have a work routine that works pretty well. Do this then; work on that tomorrow. But God gives me unexpected opportunities to be loving to others. Sometimes, I don't take the opportunity; sometimes I just ignore them. We have a Deacon's Fund here, right? The whole point is to share the love of Jesus with others in their times of need. But when we get those calls, when real people with real needs come calling us looking for help, my thoughts aren't always so generous and

kind. Sometimes, I can be judgmental. I'm tempted to form opinions about why people are in the hardship they are in; I'm tempted to judge people by their appearance. I'm so sorry to say that they cleaner and the more pleasant someone looks the happier I am to help. But no one looked as ugly as me when Jesus died for my sins. I fall so far short of God's example. I'm embarrassed.

How about you? When are you at your worst? When does a lack of love get the best of you? Are you impatient when people fail to live up to your expectations even though you fail to live up to God's? Do you judge people based on their appearance? Maybe you're just not that interested in making sacrifices; if doing good fits your schedule, you're happy to oblige, but if not... well, that's not my problem. I think if we're all going to be honest, we miss the mark on loving God and loving others. So, we need help and this passage provides just that.

There are very significant differences between Simon the Pharisee and the sinful woman. Those differences are highlighted on purpose; Luke wants us to see them; he wants us to notice just how different these two people are. First of all, there is an enormous difference in their *status*. Simon is a pharisee. In fact, do you see how frequently Luke mentions that. Over and over again Luke says, "The Pharisee" this and "the Pharisee" that; you don't even learn his name until Jesus mentions it in vs. 40. Now, if you're new to this whole church and Jesus thing, you might be wondering, "Well, what's a Pharisee." A Pharisee was a religious leader; a religious person with leadership and authority. It's like saying, "Jesus went into the house of a Baptist Pastor." If the world has a checklist for what religious person might look like, this Pharisee would fit the bill. Knows the Bible; check! Gives his 10%; check! Obeys all the rules; check! (Jesus has a checklist and it's pretty small, isn't it? Have you repented? That's Jesus' checklist).

The sinful woman's checklist is missing a lot of checks in comparison to Simon's. She's described in two verses. Vs. 37 says she is a "woman of the city." Luke certainly means to say that this woman is a prostitute. You'll notice what Simon says of her 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." Again, we're not going to talk about Simon's rampant judgmentalism (i.e what sort of woman this is), but pay attention to Simon freaks out that this woman touching is Jesus. From Simon's perspective she's unclean; she's impure and even contagious. Simon and this woman could not be more different in their status. Simon is socially acceptable; the woman is not. Oh, FBC, I hope you're learning Jesus doesn't care one lick about status. Pastor. Deacon. Bible Study teacher. Small group leader. Worship team singer. When it comes to the kingdom, that stuff doesn't matter at all.

The second difference Luke highlights is the difference of their *behavior*. The woman's behavior is truly shocking. I mean, think of it. She's washing Jesus' feet with her tears and her very own hair. It says in vs. 38 that she kissed Jesus' feet. She took perfume and poured onto Jesus. The intimacy of her actions, without question, are over the top. Most certainly, Simon and others thought she was shamelessly coming on to Jesus. Why would she does this? Let's wait on that.

Now, consider Simon's behavior. We have to wait for Jesus to fill us in on the details starting in vs. 44, but the gist of Simon's actions can be summed up in one word... nothing. Simon did nothing for Jesus.

I'm so glad I'm married to my wife because she is an excellent hostess. When we have guests, she likes to pull out the stops. We clean the house and get the yard ready like it's a contest. She's usually cooking something special and delicious. We usually have way more food than we need to make sure our guests do not go home hungry. She does all of this to make sure our guests feel special. I'm such a dunce; I don't see all those things.

I remember years ago when we had Bea and Doc Klemm over for lunch. Korby asked me, "What dessert should we have?" And I said, "Do we really need dessert? I bet they'd be fine without dessert." But Korby knew better and she said, "No, I need to prepare something." After the meal, we enjoyed the delicious dessert Korby baked. Halfway through, my good brother Doc said, "I remember years ago going to so-n-so's house and can you believe she didn't offer any dessert?" And Doc literally went on a rant on the failure of some to provide dessert. At this point, I was just covering for myself and said, "You don't say!" Thankfully, Korby saved us again.

Look specifically at Jesus' words starting in vs. 44 (READ vs. 44-46). Jesus is totally calling out Simon for not having dessert ready for him. In the 1st century, a basin of water, a towel, some ointment were customary signs of hospitality. Simon knew better; his regard for Jesus was so low that he didn't even give him the customary treatment for a guest. Simon, honestly, insulted Jesus; but the woman went above and beyond for Jesus and was lavish, over the top in her treatment of him. Why the difference? Why did they treat Jesus so differently?

The key is in the parable. Look at vs. 41-43 (READ). It's such a short, simple parable that even Simon couldn't miss it. Two debtors; one's debt was enormous. The other debt wasn't quite as big. Who's going to be more thankful, more appreciative... who's going to have more love because their debt is cancelled? The one who had the larger debt.

Go down to Jesus' punch line in vs. 47 (READ). Jesus finally lets us know why the woman did what she did and why Simon did what he did... it was love. Simon ignored the needs of Jesus failing to offer Jesus the standard gifts to guests. He had no love for him. And woman was so lavish and sacrificial in her offering because she loved.

Why? Why did she love? Where did that love come from? Here it is: because she knew how much she had been forgiven. We don't know the backstory; Luke doesn't tell us. But somehow and in some way she heard the words of forgiveness in the teachings of Jesus. She saw the compassionate forgiveness in the eyes of Jesus. She knew she was a sinner. She knew she fell incredibly short, but she saw and believed the forgiveness Jesus had for her. Simon on the other hand, was so self-righteous, so sure of his moral superiority, the thought that he needed Jesus' forgiveness probably never even dawned on him.

Knowing just how much Jesus has forgiven you is a necessary ingredient of living a life of love. Friends, if you think your sins are small, if you think your “mistakes” aren’t as bad as other people’s “mistakes” you won’t be all that impressed with the forgiveness of God found only in Christ. And if you’re not impressed with the forgiveness of God, you will walk through life with an heir of superiority and arrogance that will never stoop, that will never humble oneself, that will never sacrifice for the needs of others. That’s love. Loving others isn’t feeling all warm and fuzzy about someone; love for God and others is a growing joy in a sacrificial life for the good of another. Sacrificial. If loving others was merely doing good things for other people when it was convenient than we’d all be pretty good at loving others. But like we mentioned before, God blows up our idea and definition of love. Dying for an enemy. Being kind to people who are ungrateful. Serving people who can’t or won’t serve you back. That’s love. And we can’t and won’t do that without a deep and abiding humility that refuses to count oneself better than others. And when you know just how much you desperately need the forgiving grace of God you won’t think you’re better than others; you’ll be ready to lay your life down for them.

So, if you’re wanting to be loving (and I know so many of you do; I’m so thankful that the grace of God is alive in our community where so many of you hunger for righteousness), you need to keep cultivating a keen awareness how much God has forgiven you. Remember the parable: the person with the largest debt is the one who loved the moneylender the most. So, don’t live oblivious to the debt God has forgiven. Don’t measure the severity of your sin by your own standard; measure it by God’s standard... by his word. And when you do you’ll be humbled by God’s forgiving grace.

Now, there’s a danger here. It’s tempting to really focus and wallow in your sin; where all you see is the severity of your sin without seeing the magnificence of God’s forgiveness. The moneylender cancelled the debt; that act of grace produces a life of love. God cancels debts by Jesus’ life, death and resurrection; that’s worth celebrating! The very last thing Jesus wants you to do is miss his grace because you’re focused on your sin. Jesus didn’t die for your sins so you would live a life depressed and discouraged about how much you’ve failed him; he died for you so you would dance in the streets and shout aloud about how incredible, how lavish, how amazing is his grace and how excited you are to live with him!

So, what do you need to do? Several things, I’m sure. But can I highlight again how important the word of God is to this ambition? The Word of God will do exactly what we need; it will show us time and again the great debt we have before God. But more than that, it will remind us how God’s grace is greater than our sins. So, we’ll see the debt, but we’ll also see the forgiving grace of God. And let what you see humble you so that when sacrificing for others is needed, serving others in love will be the only natural thing you can do.

Key Verse: Luke 7:47 ~ Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven - for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.

#### Questions for the week

- Where is your lack of love for others most readily seen? In your attitude? Words? Behavior?

- What was the most important word or message you heard in the sermon today? Tell a friend or family member and explain why.
- What are ways you can see more of God in his word? Think of a way to change your routine to either hear or read his word more regularly.