

“The Forgiveness of Jesus”

Luke 7:36-50

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Luke 7:36-50 “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. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she 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.

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."

Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you."

"Tell me, teacher," he said.

"Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled."

"You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this 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. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven--for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."

Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Have you ever needed forgiveness?

Have you ever needed forgiveness?

I'm not asking if you have ever done wrong things.

I've never met a person who would not admit that they have done things they wish they had not done.

In fact I've never met a person who would not admit that they have **intentionally** done things that were wrong.

Most, if not all of us, are quite ready to admit we are human and we all make mistakes.

But that is not what I asked. I asked, "Have you ever needed forgiveness?"

I'm not asking if you have ever needed to be cut a little slack.

I've never met a person who would not admit that from time to time they have needed a little understanding for the things they've done.

They admit that they have needed others to understand the circumstances surrounding their actions.

Yes, they did wrong things, even hurtful, harmful things, but with a little understanding those actions could be explained.

"Surely you wouldn't hold me as responsible if you understood."

"Yes, I know I hurt you BUT if you knew what I was going through at the time, you'd understand."

But I didn't ask if you have ever needed understanding, I asked, "Have you ever needed forgiveness?"

Have you ever had someone tell you they forgave you for something you hadn't done?

For example, they come to you and tell you that they have decided to forgive you for having said something negative about them.

You know you didn't say any such thing and so you find yourself a bit irked first of all that you've been accused of it and secondly that you are being forgiven for it.

You didn't do anything for which you needed to be forgiven.

Clearly you don't need forgiveness when no wrong has been done.

Again, I ask, have you ever needed forgiveness?

We say "forgive me" many times in our relationships when we don't mean it.

We wash the dirt out of a wound on our child's foot. They cry and we say we are sorry and ask them to forgive us for hurting them.

We don't mean that, we don't really need forgiveness, we just want understanding.

Or another example, we inadvertently walk in front of someone and we politely say, "Forgive me."

We don't mean it. There was no intention of harm and no harm was done.

Have you ever needed forgiveness?

You see, real forgiveness is about real guilt.

We don't really need forgiveness if we're not really guilty.

If I didn't do it, I don't need forgiveness.

But we also think that if I had no choice but to do it, I'm not guilty,

or if I didn't mean to do it, I'm not guilty,

or if there were good reasons why I did it, then I'm not guilty.

And if I'm not guilty or not very guilty then I don't need forgiveness, at best my actions should be overlooked and at worst they should be excused.

- I ask you to forgive me because I couldn't help but do it.
- I ask you to forgive me because I didn't mean to do it.
- I ask you to forgive me because I usually do better and I'll do better next time.

That's not about forgiveness because we are not admitting real guilt.

Real forgiveness is needed when there is real guilt.

Real forgiveness is needed where there are no mitigating circumstances and no excuses.

Real forgiveness is needed:

- when what was done was wrong and I did it,
- when I have no plea except “guilty”
- and when I believe there is no excuse and offer no excuse,
- and when I stand fully responsible for the consequences.

Have you ever needed real forgiveness?

Let me increase the importance of the question: Have you ever needed God’s forgiveness?

If you believe in God then it hasn’t taken much reflection on who God is, as revealed in his word the Bible and in his Word the Son, for you to see how far short we all fall in living up to his perfect love.

Just read the 10 Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount or watch how Jesus lived and died and we will see “a goodness that shames us.” (Mackintosh 9)

We look at Jesus’ definition and demonstration of morality, of truthfulness, of faithfulness, of mercy and love and we realize that we are guilty.

But the closer we look at Jesus the more we come to understand it is more than just what we do or don’t do.

It is not just that we are immoral, deceitful, selfish and self-centered in our dealings with others - those are just the symptoms of **the greater problem that we are out of relationship with God** and don’t want to be in relationship with God on God’s terms.

By our very nature we are at odds with God and the supreme question of religion is how we can be made right with Him.

I keep raising the question, “have you ever needed forgiveness” because I’m certain that just like the Pharisee, Simon, in the story we just read, there are, today, many, even in church, who have never received God’s forgiveness because they have never acknowledged their need of it.

They have readily admitted doing wrong, but always with excuse, always with a reason, in them or the circumstances, why they weren’t REALLY guilty or why they SHOULD BE forgiven.

They know they are at odds with God but the solution they propose is not about real guilt and real forgiveness.

And I also keep asking, “Have you ever needed God’s forgiveness” **because I’m just as certain that real forgiveness is available today** to the one who fully admits his need to Jesus.

The two characters in the story demonstrate vividly the difference between the one who doesn’t feel the need for real forgiveness and the one who knows her need for real forgiveness.

Look with me at each of them.

The Pharisees were the good guys in Jesus’ day.

They were the religious people.

My daughter overheard a woman in line in the back of the airplane, waiting to de-board, complain about another woman in front of her who was letting people out of their seats and into line, “Must be a Christian!”

In Jesus’ day that would have been a Pharisee.

This Pharisee’s name was Simon.

Simon must have been curious about Jesus because he invited Jesus to dinner.

But his curiosity was colored by skepticism or maybe even cynicism.

Simon had already tipped his hand regarding his attitude toward Jesus by the way he treated, or more precisely the way he didn't treat, Jesus as his guest.

The Pharisees had God all figured out.

God was holy and the only way to approach a holy God, the only way to have a relationship with a holy God, and the only way to be part of the Kingdom of a holy God, was to be holy.

And the Pharisees were "hell-bent" on being holy.

They had developed a code of 612 things that one was to do or not to do to be acceptable to God.

And the Pharisees called people to that higher standard.

They had an ethical idealism that recoiled at forgiveness.

Forgiveness would just encourage people to more sin.

Oh yes, maybe God needed to excuse the past, but the real issue was whether you would do better in the future.

And so the Pharisee offers himself in a deal with God – "I'll do better in the future, if you will overlook the past."

Real forgiveness was not in the equation.

And the same is true today for many religious people.

They aren't really guilty for anything given their circumstances and excuses and thus they aren't in need of real forgiveness.

For them it is not about forgiveness, it is about doing better.

You can then more easily understand how scandalized the religious community was when Jesus came along and spent time with those whom the Pharisees labeled "sinners".

"Sinners" were those who obviously weren't living up to the standard, those who had given up, and even those who weren't trying.

- Matthew 11:19 "They say he is a friend of... sinners."
- Matthew 9:11 "Why does your teacher eat with... sinners."

- Luke 15:1 “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

The Pharisees preached the Kingdom of God and how you could be part of it and then Jesus came along preaching the Kingdom of God. But the way he preached it and acted about it was the opposite of what the Pharisees taught and acted.

The Pharisees said “measure up.”

Jesus said, “Come and receive my forgiveness.”

Look now at the woman in our story.

She is such a “nobody” she’s not even given a name.

Because she was allowed in, apparently this was not a private meal but a more public banquet to which others might come and sit nearer the walls and listen to the conversations.

So in she came and everybody knew **what** she was.

The author said that she was a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town.

Simon, the Pharisee, said he knew what kind of woman she was – a sinner.

Most likely she was a prostitute or an adulteress though possibly she ran an immoral or illegal business in the town.

In any case she was the opposite of what the Pharisee assumed you needed to be, to be accepted in God’s kingdom.

But in she came and she stood behind Jesus weeping and she began to wet his feet with her tears and to wipe them with her hair and kiss his feet and pour expensive perfume on them.

People in that day would **sit** by tables to eat family meals but in a banquet such as this, they would **lie down** around a low table, with their heads pointed toward the table and their bodies propped up on pillows, with their legs and feet angling out behind them.

Luke relates the incident with language that describes the event in live action – “she stood behind him at his feet weeping.”

You can easily imagine the scene:

- They are talking to one another at the table when out of the corners of their eyes they see this woman not only enter but come up behind Jesus.
- She's carrying a perfume jar and she stops and kneels down right over Jesus' feet.
- Everyone keeps talking, but no one is listening because of what they see happening.
- She is crying, tears flowing so profusely that Jesus' feet become wet.
- I imagine the conversation stops as they see what happens next.
- The woman takes her hair in her hands and begins to wipe the tears from Jesus' feet.

To the Pharisees watching it is not sensuous, it is scandalous.

Scandalous that a man of God would have anything to do with the likes of her.

When Jesus didn't refuse the affection of the sinful woman, Simon was offended and concluded that Jesus was certainly not a prophet because either he didn't know what this woman was or he shouldn't have allowed her to touch him.

But allow her he does and precisely because she is the kind of woman she is.

And I don't mean because of the kind of sin, but I do mean because she is the kind of woman who knows she needs forgiveness.

The difference between Simon and the woman was not what Simon thought; he thought the difference was sin.

- But the real difference was humility.
- The real difference was that she admitted her need and he didn't.
- The real difference was that she sought forgiveness and he didn't think he needed it.

Either Luke does not tell us all that was said between Jesus and the woman at this time or more likely the woman had heard enough of and from Jesus before that, as she came, her actions were all the words needed to express a humble admission of need and her faith in Jesus to meet that need – the forgiveness of her sins.

The others present asked, “Who is this who even forgives sins?”

The woman knew exactly who he was – He was the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world.

Maybe she had seen him heal the paralyzed man when Jesus said to him “The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” and she believed - she placed her faith in him to forgive her.

In one sense it is amazing that this woman wanted to be near Jesus - Jesus’ standard was high.

Through the Sermon on the Mount he had more thoroughly and clearly demonstrated the holy standard of the Kingdom of God than even the Pharisees.

Jesus very presence was holiness, perfection, and the exact representation of a holy God.

Jesus was the one you’d think she’d feel **most** uncomfortable around – even the one she’d not want to get near for how it would make her feel.

Instead she comes seeking him – she wanted to be near him, with him, and honor him.

Why?

I think Hugh Mackintosh captured it 75 years ago when he wrote: “In Jesus company, people became aware by degrees that he was reading their nature to the depths, probing motives, discerning wishes, catching unspoken prayers; not, however, with the cruel penetration of steely intelligence but by a new intensity of love. He was indeed altogether open-eyed about low and base things in their lives. His judgment could be of a dreadful severity. His holiness burned in white flame near which foulness could not live. In spite of this uncompromising rightness – or rather, on account of it – people

were able to place the utmost confidence in his affection; and in case after case they seem to have flung themselves upon his strength for protection from themselves and against the power of evil... Precisely when their shame grew intolerable, his treatment of them removed their sad despair... He somehow let them know that he and they were friends for life. His attitude was at once so stern and yet so understanding, so holy and yet so merciful, that in him God seemed to be standing by their side, and their eyes opened to the truth that what through Jesus' love they were receiving was the forgiveness of God himself." Mackintosh 86-87

It's not love if it says I excuse you or I'll ignore it.

We are afraid of a love that pretends we aren't what we know we are.

We are afraid that such false love will wake up to reality some day and no longer want anything to do with us.

Real love acknowledges the full weight of my sin and fully forgives me not based on excuses, mitigating circumstances or pledges to make up for it – but based solely on Jesus' death in my place.

It is **because** we know that he knows us as we really are and that in his love he forgives us not based on us but based solely on him, that we dare to come to him and humbly receive his forgiveness.

Guilt before God is a painful sense of personal accountability and of self-contempt and thus an alienation from God.

I did it, it was wrong, and I detest myself for having done it and I know my sin separates me from a holy God.

Guilt-ridden people desperately need to know God's forgiveness.

They may consider themselves the least forgivable but they are objects of God's mercy.

Many Christians live with a secret guilt about sins of the past.

They believe they **can** be forgiven sufficiently to go to heaven but they **can't** be forgiven sufficiently to be in relationship with God or of any real use to God while still here on earth.

They think of themselves as “damaged goods”.

God can accept them but not like them; He can forgive them but not use them; He can love them from afar but not embrace them.

But Jesus comes right into the middle of that guilt and says, “I know you, I know what you are, but I love you and if you will come to me I will forgive you.

And that forgiveness is real – it removes the guilt and restores the glad sense that my relationship with God is whole.

I concur with those who say that the woman had already acknowledged her sin and received the forgiveness of Jesus even before she entered that banquet room.

- Her gift of perfume and her actions are of heart-felt worship rather than confession.
- Hers are tears of joy rather than penitence.
- Jesus himself makes the point that her actions were love, not contrition.

Jesus also said, “Her many sins have been forgiven” even before he pronounced forgiveness.

Her coming was fulfillment of the only demand Jesus makes – she came in faith – believing that he could and would meet her need for forgiveness.

And Jesus then openly acknowledges before her accusers what she already knew – “Your sins are forgiven.”

Can you imagine the feelings of that woman that day?

In a lengthy but powerful quote listen to Charles Spurgeon capture the essence of such forgiveness:

“Could there be a sweeter word in any language than that word ‘forgiveness’, when it sounds in a guilty sinner’s ear? Blessed, forever blessed be that dear star of pardon, which shines into the condemned cell, and gives the perishing a gleam of hope amid the midnight of despair!

Can it be possible that sin, such sin as mine, can be forgiven, forgiven altogether, and forever? Hell is my portion as a sinner —

there is no possibility of my escaping from it while sin remains upon me — can the load of guilt be lifted, the crimson stain removed? Can the stones of my prison-house ever be loosed from their mortises, or the doors be lifted from their hinges?

Jesus tells me that I may yet be clear. Forever blessed be the revelation of atoning love, which not only tells me that pardon is possible, but that it is secured to all who rest in Jesus. I have believed in the appointed propitiation, even Jesus crucified, and therefore my sins are at this moment, and forever, forgiven by virtue of His substitutionary pains and death.

What joy is this! What bliss to be a perfectly pardoned soul! My soul dedicates all her powers to Him who of His own unpurchased love became my surety, and wrought out for me redemption through His blood. What riches of grace does free forgiveness exhibit!

To forgive at all, to forgive fully, to forgive freely, to forgive forever! Here is a constellation of wonders; and when I think of how great my sins were, how dear were the precious drops which cleansed me from them, and how gracious was the method by which pardon was sealed home to me, I am in a maze of wondering worshipping affection. I bow before the throne which absolves me, I clasp the cross which delivers me, I serve henceforth all my days the Incarnate God, through whom I am this night a pardoned soul. (Spurgeon

Morning and Evening)

Have you ever needed God's forgiveness?

The same Jesus who loved sinners then, loves us now.

He is no less holy but neither is he any less accepting of us than of that woman – we who come humbly acknowledging our very **real need** and receiving by faith his very **real forgiveness**.

Have you ever needed God's forgiveness?

Do you need it now?

Come!

Mackintosh, Hugh Ross [The Christian Experience of Forgiveness](#) Nisbet, London 1927