

**Sermon preached by Pastor Robert Barnett at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, October 7, 2007**

FORGIVEN MUCH, LOVE MUCH

Luke 7:36-50

I have a friend in Massachusetts whose name is Dan. He was the sort of fellow who got in trouble a lot. He was a drug addict and spent some time in jail. He had attended our church from time to time and one night, in the emptiness of his soul, he believed the good news that Jesus Christ saves sinners. His life was dramatically transformed. God put in Dan's heart the burning desire to tell everyone he met about Jesus.

Dan got involved in our church's evangelism program and led his high school drinking and drugging buddy to Christ. Together, they started an outreach to men addicted to alcohol and drugs. Dan was hungry to learn everything he could about Jesus, so he joined our Sunday school, got involved with a small group Bible study, and began meeting with me for discipleship. He loved the Lord and it showed.

Dan had something that I wanted for myself, something that every Christian should desire. A passionate love for His savior! His experience was not a formal, just go-to-church, run through-the-motions thing. He served the Lord. He knew that Christ had reached down and pulled him out of a horrible pit, and because of that, he lived each day with fervent devotion to Christ. Dan could identify with the woman in our passage and say, "I have been forgiven much, and so I love much."

I wonder this morning how you feel about the Lord Jesus. Do you love Him? I don't mean, "Do you serve Him?" Rather, I mean, "Do you love Him, passionately love Him?" I believe that if you love Him, you will never have to be persuaded to serve Him.

It's my great longing as a Christian to grow to love Jesus more than I do. And it's my great longing that we be a church of people who are characterized by a great love for Jesus. To that end, I ask that you look with me at this passage in Luke's Gospel.

The story is interesting. Jesus is invited to a banquet at the home of a Pharisee named Simon. You probably remember that Pharisees were experts in following the Law of Moses. They were very religious. Many people saw Pharisees as examples of great holiness and righteousness. And they were at loggerheads with Jesus over things such as the proper way to keep the Sabbath and the right attitude to have toward sinners.

We're not sure why Simon invited Jesus. He may have been curious about His miracles or the things that He taught. Maybe he wanted to find something wrong in what Jesus said and use that to make further accusations. Whatever the reason, we find Jesus at Simon's home.

In those days, when people came over for dinner, they did not sit on chairs around a table but reclined on couches, with their feet behind them; resting on one elbow and eating with the other hand. Sometimes people from the general public would simply come in and listen to the dinner-time conversation.

A woman comes into the banquet, stands behind Jesus and anoints His feet with perfume. The passage may remind you of a similar story, when Mary of Bethany anointed Jesus' feet, but that was a different event. On this particular occasion, the woman is described as a "sinner," a common Greek euphemism for a prostitute. Her reputation was apparently well known in that town. She is not the host, not even a guest, but in her love, she shows Jesus ordinary common courtesies that Simon should have given. The contrast is clear, the woman loved Jesus and the Pharisee did not.

In this story, Jesus says we should be like the woman and not the Pharisee. Does that sound strange? Let's see why.

AN ACCURATE VIEW OF YOURSELF

Jesus compares Simon's attitude with the woman's by telling him a parable. Look at verse 41: "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii (what the average worker earned in about a year and a half) 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?"

In this parable, both debtors were unable to repay. Both were in over their heads. If you can't repay, you *can't* repay! You're bankrupt! Jesus wasn't trying to compare the woman's sin with Simon's. Both were sinners. The woman knew she was a big sinner. The Pharisee didn't have a clue. He thought that because he was a religious person, he was OK. Through his own merit – his good works, his obeying the Ten Commandments, his personal holiness – Simon believed that he was worthy of God.

Simon was a religious person and like most religious people, he did not say, "I don't need God." He didn't claim to be without sin. Rather, he said, "I don't need God as much as the other guy." He compared himself to the woman and was unable to get a clear perception of himself.

We do the same thing. We hear about a drug addict sprawled out in a gutter with a needle in her arm, the pedophile, the man who abandoned his wife and children, crooked thieves and murderers, Islamic terrorists. We think that the world would be much better off with fewer people like them, and more people like us.

Let me illustrate. Which person is in bigger trouble: the guy drowning in 50 feet of water or the guy drowning in 500 feet of water? The guy in 50 feet doesn't say, "Well, at least I'm better off than that poor wretch over there!" It wouldn't do any good for the guy in 500 feet of water to think, "If I can just swim over to where that guy is in 50 feet of water, I'll be okay!" Both need

rescuing. In God's sight, both are guilty as lawbreakers. Both are debtors and neither has the ability to repay.

Religious people – church-going folks like you and me – have a tendency to think that we are really not that corrupt. We are just not that flawed. But we are! The Bible locates the source of our sinfulness in the heart. Look at just a few verses over in Luke 6:43-45:

No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.

The problem is inside, in the heart. In the Old Testament, the prophet Jeremiah said: “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” You and I have hearts that are corrupt. All of us struggle with pride and self-righteousness. We are often more concerned about our reputation before men than God's opinion of us. We need help. We need heart change.

When we reduce Christianity to outward behavior, when we try to manage our Christian lives through external change, we miss the point. We start acting OK on the outside and we think we're OK on the inside. That was Simon's problem. He did not have an accurate perception of himself. His outward behavior may have been exemplary, but his heart was corrupt. Unlike the woman, he did not see himself as a great sinner and he could not love Jesus.

What about you? Do you see yourself as a great sinner? Do you identify with the Pharisee or with the prostitute?

AN EXTRAVAGANT RESPONSE

The woman saw herself as a great sinner. And she understood that Jesus was a great Savior. Her actions indicate that she knew of Jesus' teaching. Jesus' words to her in verses 48 and 50, “Your sins are forgiven. . . Your faith has saved you; go in peace,” are words of assurance. Perhaps she heard about the news that Jesus came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. She may have known of greedy tax collectors who had been transformed by coming to Jesus.

She thought, “This Man offers forgiveness even to a sinner like me!” And so she repented of her sins and put her trust in this One who came to seek and to save the lost. She experienced the grace and mercy of Jesus and it was clear by her actions that she knew Jesus forgave sins.

It is important to note that the woman's love for Jesus was the effect of her forgiveness, not the cause. It was the result of her forgiveness, not the reason. She loved because He first loved her.

The woman's response to Jesus was personal, intimate, full of emotion. She stood at His feet behind Him weeping. She washed His feet with her tears. The word *weeping* is the same word

used to describe a rain shower. Not just a little moisture in the eye, but a river of tears. She was overcome with real emotion. Her faith in Jesus was not simply a religious ritual, something to do on Sunday morning. It was the most important thing in her life. Because she knew that even though she was a big sinner, Jesus forgave her.

I remember once talking with my friend Dan about the Lord's promise of forgiveness in an Old Testament passage. I spoke in sort of a matter-of-fact way, almost academically. But as we read the passage together, he began to cry. He was grateful for what Jesus had done for him. Dan was blown away with the fact that Jesus forgave him. That's why he told everyone he met about Jesus.

Now for many of us, a grateful response to Jesus may not mean tears. Not all of us are built that way. But gratitude always involves our emotions. It is never cold, dispassionate. Love is always personal.

Look again at the woman's extravagant response to Jesus. When she anointed Christ with perfume, she gave the Lord all that she had. Perfume was a tool of her trade. It was expensive, probably her prized possession. In the manner of the day, she likely wore it on a string around her neck and had to break the jar and pour out all the contents. When she was anointing the Lord's feet, she was giving prostitution, her way of life, everything she had to Him.

Friends, when we come to realize that we are great sinners and really know that Jesus forgives us, we respond. Not, "I want to go to heaven, so I'll ask you into my life. I'll go to church and try to be good. But the rest of my life, my time, my private thoughts, belong to me. I'm not breaking my jar for you!" That is not the response of someone who has been rescued from sin.

What about you? What are you pouring out? Do you love Jesus like the prostitute?

A CHANGED LIFE

Jesus told us that the greatest commandments are first to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind," and to "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39). If you don't see the depth of your need and that Jesus has forgiven you, you will not love much. But, when you understand that you have been forgiven, you will love God and people.

This is an amazing principle: The one who is forgiven much, loves much. Think for a moment what that means in how we love people and how we love God.

What is the natural response when someone does you wrong? Defend yourself. Stick up for your rights. Hold their sins against them. But what if you thought of yourself as a great sinner in need of a great savior? Would you say, "How can I hold someone else's sins against them when I myself am a sinner?" You would love people just as Christ loves them.

How would you react when you suffer, when the circumstances of life seem hurled against you? Do you acknowledge God's sovereignty and go in peace, as Jesus said? Or do you grumble and complain? I confess that I do. Yet the Scripture tells us to "not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." How do we do this? We must have grateful hearts that love Jesus more and more.

Does your service for the Lord show that you love him? Are you sharing your faith with people you know? Do you give generously to His church and His work around the world? Are you hungry to learn what you can about the Lord, so you meet with others to study and learn his Word? If not, you may be more like Simon than the woman.

Maybe you feel like I'm asking you to "do" more. You're right, all of us need to serve Jesus more with our time, money and talents. But first, we need to love Him more. J.C. Ryle wrote:

More "doing" for Christ is the universal demand of all the Churches. It is the one point on which all are agreed. All desire to see among Christians, more good works, more self-denial, more practical obedience to Christ's commands. But what will produce these things? Nothing, nothing but love. There never will be more done for Christ until there is more hearty love to Christ Himself. The fear of punishment, the desire of reward, the sense of duty, are all useful arguments, in their way, to persuade men to holiness. But they are all weak and powerless, until a man loves Christ. Once let that mighty principle get hold of a man, and you will see his whole life changed.

How do we love Him more? Remember that you have been forgiven much.

If we have an accurate view of ourselves, we will identify with the prostitute and not the Pharisee. We will think of ourselves as great sinners in need of a great Savior.

If we trust in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ – His death on a Cross for our sins – we will be forgiven. Then, we can respond in love to Him.

The only way to love Jesus much is to remember that you have been forgiven much.

This is the principal: Forgiven much, love much.