

Luke 7:40-50
March 24, 2019

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

What we said last week that all of us, by God's grace, had a special person or persons who believed in us and loved us enough to point us to Jesus. And though our journeys are not exactly the same, there is a similarity. All of us discovered **the road to forgiveness** with the help of those who loved us. As we go through the remainder of this text, let's reinforce what the **road of forgiveness** looks like so that we can help others move toward Jesus. Let's begin.

BOOK (NIV 1984):

V.40:

- Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said.

V.41:

- "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.

V.42:

- 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?"

V.43:

- Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

V.44:

- 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.

V.45:

- You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet.

V.46:

- You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.

V.47:

- Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."

V.48:

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

V.49:

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

V.50:

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

Process Observations/Questions:

Q V.41-43: We have two men in debt. One owes 10x more than the other, but the moneylender chooses to cancel both debts. Jesus asks, “Which man will love the moneylender more?” What did you see? [The one who owed 500 denarii]

Q: What does love got do with this?! The question could have easily been, “Which man will be the most grateful for the canceled debt?” [Let people engage; Love involves deep gratitude; Love gives extravagantly]

Q: So what is the message of the parable? [A person who is forgiven much loves more than a person who is forgiven little.]

Q: When it comes to forgiveness of debt, was the *amount* of debt critical to this story? [No. The most important point is that both Simon and the woman were **both debtors**. *And both of them were bankrupt and could not pay their debt to God*. The difference between the woman and Simon was that she was *aware* of her debt, while Simon was *unaware* of his debt.]

Illustration: Both debtors were unable to repay. Both were in over their heads. If you can't repay, you *can't* repay! You're bankrupt! The creditor can take everything you own to recover at least part of his losses. Which person is in bigger trouble: the guy drowning in 50 feet of water or the guy drowning in 500 feet of water? It would be ridiculous for the guy in 50 feet of water to look at the guy in 500 feet and think, “Well, at least I'm better off than that poor wretch!” And, 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!”

Q V.44-47: Jesus gives this parable more life by pointing out this woman to Simon.

Q: He highlighted all the things a good host would have done but didn't. What do you see? [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.]

Q V.47: Why did Jesus feel a need to point this out to Simon? [He had not been a gracious host to the Lord Jesus. There was no sign that Simon loved Him or had affection for Him. She “loved much.” She had a deeper sense of her sin—and consequently a deeper sense of the mercy she had received than Simon had.]

Q: Do you think that the Pharisee was aware of the social custom to greet guests with a kiss and wash their feet? If yes, why didn't follow the custom? [Let people engage]

Q V.48: What does Jesus declare to the woman? [“Your sins are forgiven.”]

Q: How do the guests react? [They are wondering how Jesus was able to “forgive sins.”]

Process Q: Do you know lost ones who are wondering the same thing? If someone said, “How do you know that Jesus is able to forgive sins, what would you tell them? [Let people engage - How did the woman know that her sins were forgiven? ***Jesus told her***. How do we know today that we

have been forgiven? *God tells us so in His Word*. Here are just a few verses to consider: Isa 43:25; 55:6–7; Acts 13:38–39; Romans 4:7–8; and Hebrews 8:12.]

Q V.48: On what basis did this woman receive salvation? [Her FAITH – not her works, and it was irrelevant how big her sin debt was.]

Q: Upon receiving her salvation, what was she able to do? [Go in PEACE]

Q: Why do you think it was important for Jesus to tell her “go in peace?” [Let people engage. All of us need the assurance that we no longer need to “worry or be anxious” about our standing with Jesus. We have been adopted, grafted in, to the family of God. We need to remember that we are a part of the royal family, the precious children of the King and the Prince of Peace!!]

LOOK:

Your love for the Lord is directly related to your estimate of how greatly you have sinned and how much he has forgiven you. It’s not how much you sin, but how deeply you feel it that matters. If you figure that you are a “little sinner,” then all you need is a “little Savior.” If you are a “moderate sinner,” then what you need is a “moderate Savior.” But if you are “big sinner,” you need a “big Savior.” And those who have a “little Savior,” will love him very little. But those who have a “big Savior” will love him greatly. Many of us who were raised in the church struggle precisely at this point. We don’t love Christ very much because we have forgotten what we were and what we would have been if Christ had not found us. When our sin seems small, our love cannot be very great.

There are hundreds of people like the Pharisee today: respectable, conventional, good people. They look down their noses at the permissive society. They curl their lip at the decay in moral standards. Like the Pharisee, they think they’re good, but they are not; they’re simply dull. They think they’re being moral, but they are not; they’re simply feeling sanctimonious.

What an important warning to those of us who value righteousness and truth. Humility, compassion, love, and righteous tolerance mark true followers. We can never forget that we are debtors to grace who, in the presence of Jesus, know we still have a long way to go.

Q: How does Jesus help us? [We can’t do it, but there’s One who can. Because of Jesus, this is possible]

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 198–199). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

The critical host (vv. 39–43). Simon was embarrassed, both for himself and for his guests. People had been saying that Jesus was a great Prophet (Luke 7:16), but He certainly was not exhibiting much prophetic discernment if He allowed a sinful woman to anoint His feet! He must be a fraud.

Simon's real problem was *blindness*: he could not see himself, the woman, or the Lord Jesus. It was easy for him to say, "*She* is a sinner!" but impossible for him to say, "I am also a sinner!" (see Luke 18:9–14) Jesus proved that He was indeed a prophet by reading Simon's thoughts and revealing his needs.

The parable does not deal with the *amount* of sin in a person's life but the *awareness* of that sin in his heart. How much sin must a person commit to be a sinner? Simon and the woman were both sinners. Simon was guilty of sins of the spirit, especially pride, while the woman was guilty of sins of the flesh (see 2 Cor. 7:1). Her sins were known, while Simon's sins were hidden to everyone except God. *And both of them were bankrupt and could not pay their debt to God.* Simon was just as spiritually bankrupt as the woman, only he did not realize it.

Forgiveness is a gift of God's grace; the debt was paid in full by Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18–19). The word *frankly* means "graciously and freely." The woman accepted God's free offer of salvation and expressed her love openly. Simon rejected that offer and remained unforgiven. He was not only blind to himself, but he was blind to the woman and to his honored guest!

The forgiving Savior (vv. 44–50). The woman was guilty of sins of commission, but Simon was guilty of sins of omission. He had not been a gracious host to the Lord Jesus. (For a contrast, see Abraham in Gen. 18:1–8.) Everything that Simon neglected to do, the woman did—and she did it better!

There are two errors we must avoid as we interpret our Lord's words. First, we must not conclude that this woman was saved by her tears and her gift. Jesus made it clear that it was *her faith* alone that saved her (Luke 7:50), for no amount of good works can pay for salvation (Titus 3:4–7).

Nor should we think that lost sinners are saved by love, either God's love for them or their love for God. God loves the whole world (John 3:16), yet the whole world is not saved. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph. 2:8–9, NKJV). Grace is love that pays a price, and that price was the death of the Son of God on the cross.

Jesus did not reject either the woman's tears or her gift of ointment, because her works were the evidence of her faith. "Faith without works is dead" (see James 2:14–26). We are not saved by faith plus works; we are saved by a faith that leads to works. This anonymous woman illustrates the truth of Galatians 5:6, "The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love" (NIV).

How did the woman know that her sins were forgiven? *Jesus told her.* How do we know today that we have been forgiven? *God tells us so in His Word.* Here are just a few verses to consider: Isaiah 1:18; 43:25–26; 55:6–7; Acts 13:38–39; Romans 4:7–8; Ephesians 4:32; and Hebrews 8:12. Once you understand the meaning of God's grace you have no trouble receiving His free and full forgiveness and rejoicing in it.

Of course, the legalistic critics at the dinner were shocked when Jesus said, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven." By saying this, Jesus was claiming to be God! (see Luke 5:21) But He *is*

God, and He died for the sins that she committed. His words of forgiveness were not cheap words; they cost Him dearly on the cross.

How was this woman saved? She repented of her sins and put her faith in Jesus Christ. How did she know she was truly forgiven? She had the assurance of His word. What was the proof of her salvation? Her love for Christ expressed in sacrificial devotion to Him. For the first time in her life, she had peace with God (Luke 7:50). Literally it reads, “Go *into* peace,” for she had moved out of the sphere of enmity toward God and was now enjoying peace with God (Rom. 5:1; 8:7–8).

When Jesus healed the centurion’s servant, it was a great miracle. An even greater miracle was His raising the widow’s son from the dead. But in this chapter, the greatest miracle of all was His saving this woman from her sins and making her a new person. The miracle of salvation has to be the greatest miracle of all, for it meets the greatest need, brings the greatest results (and they last forever), and cost the greatest price.

Simon was blind to the woman and blind to himself. He saw her past, but Jesus saw her future. I wonder how many rejected sinners have found salvation through the testimony of this woman in Luke’s Gospel. She encourages us to believe that Jesus can take any sinner and make him or her into a child of God.

But God’s forgiveness is not automatic; we can reject His grace if we will. In 1830, a man named George Wilson was arrested for mail theft, the penalty for which was hanging. After a time, President Andrew Jackson gave Wilson a pardon, *but he refused to accept it!* The authorities were puzzled: should Wilson be freed or hanged?

They consulted Chief Justice John Marshall, who handed down this decision: “A pardon is a slip of paper, the value of which is determined by the acceptance of the person to be pardoned. If it is refused, it is no pardon. George Wilson must be hanged.”

If you have never accepted God’s pardon, now is the time to believe and be saved.

Martin, J. A. (1985). Luke. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, p. 224). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

7:40–43. **Jesus**, knowing Simon’s thoughts (cf. 5:22), taught in a parable that a person who is forgiven much loves more than a person who is forgiven little. In the parable one man was forgiven a debt 10 times greater than another man—**500 denarii** compared with **50 denarii**. These were huge debts, for one denarius coin was worth a day’s wages. When asked **which** one would **love** the lender **more**, **Simon** rightly responded that **the one who** was forgiven the larger **debt** would naturally be more inclined to greater love. Jesus then applied the parable to the woman.

7:44–50. **The woman** had been **forgiven** much and therefore **she loved** Jesus very **much**. Jesus was not implying that the Pharisee did not have much need for forgiveness. His point was that “a sinner” who is forgiven is naturally going to love and thank the One who has forgiven her. Simon’s treatment of Jesus differed vastly from the woman’s. She was evidencing that she loved Jesus for she realized that she had been forgiven much. She realized that she was a sinner and in need of forgiveness. In contrast, Simon saw himself as pure and righteous and therefore did not need to treat Jesus in a special manner. In fact, he did not even extend to Jesus the normal courtesies of that day: greeting a male by **a kiss** on the cheek, and anointing a guest’s **head** with a small portion of **oil**. In effect he did not seem to think Jesus could do anything for him, for he did not consider Jesus a prophet (v. 39).

But the woman was not forgiven because of her love; rather, she loved because she was forgiven (vv. 47–48). Her faith brought her salvation: **Your faith has saved you; go in peace** (cf.

8:48). Her faith in turn caused her to respond in love. **The other dinner guests** wondered **who Jesus is** since He forgave **sins** (cf. 5:21). Though Jesus in this interchange with Simon never explicitly stated His claim to be the Messiah, He spoke as He did because He is the Messiah.

Stein, R. H. (1992). Luke (Vol. 24, pp. 238–239). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

The Lukan Message

Since this passage concludes the section entitled “Who Is This Jesus?” it should not be surprising that its central teaching is Christological. The emphasis in the passage falls upon the question in Luke 7:49, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” Luke intended that his readers would answer this question in light of what preceded in this and the previous chapters. This Jesus is one who has unusual power, for he can heal the sick (7:1–10) and even raise the dead (7:11–17). He is the Coming One for whom Israel awaited and hoped (7:18–35). He is indeed a prophet but more than a prophet, for he has the authority to forgive sins (7:36–50). To this can be added earlier statements about his being the Son of the Most High, Lord, Christ, Son of David, Son of Man, and Savior of the world. Theophilus and Luke’s other readers could know the certainty of this because of the things Jesus did (7:18, 22) and because of what this account reveals concerning Jesus’ unusual knowledge (of Simon’s thoughts and the woman’s status) and authority (to forgive sins). As elsewhere (see comments on 7:23) an individual’s attitude toward Jesus revealed her or his relationship with God.

Several other Lukan themes also appear in this account. One involves the need for forgiveness and how this forgiveness (7:48–49), which is a synonym for salvation (7:50), comes through faith (7:50). We find a frequent tie between salvation and faith in Luke. See Introduction 8 (6). A final theme that will be mentioned involves the great reversal. Once again the one expected to have the inside track to forgiveness and salvation is found outside of God’s kingdom. Simon knew nothing of love and gratitude toward Jesus. The reason is clear. He knew nothing of the forgiveness and salvation Jesus brings. On the other hand, the outcast, a woman who was a sinner and despised by religious leaders such as Simon, found forgiveness. Again the last have become first and the first last. See Introduction 8 (5).

7:40 Jesus sought to disarm Simon’s prejudice by drawing him into the parable (cf. 10:36). The implicit Christological teachings in this incident should be noted: (1) Jesus knew Simon’s thoughts (cf. 5:22; 6:8); (2) he knew that the woman was a sinner as the parable shows and thus refuted Simon’s second presupposition (see previous verse); (3) Jesus is able to forgive sins—something God alone can do (cf. 5:21; 7:49); and (4) Simon’s and the woman’s standing before God was revealed and determined by their attitude toward Jesus.

Tell me, Teacher. This is the first use of this particular title for Jesus in the Gospel (cf. 8:49; 9:38; 10:25; etc.). It was used of John the Baptist in 3:12. See comments on 5:5.

7:41 Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. For the use of “a certain ...” for introducing parables, see comments on 10:30.

One owed him five hundred denarii. This sum would be approximately one and a half years’ wages. See comments on 10:35; 20:24. Fifty denarii would be about two months’ wages.

7:42 So he canceled the debts of both. Sin is frequently referred to as a “debt,” so this analogy in the parable would easily be understood as parallel to the forgiveness of sins (cf. Matt

6:12 with Luke 11:4). Compare also the interchange of “sinners” and “more guilty” (literally *debtors*) in 13:2, 4.

Now which of them will love him more? Since there is no specific word for *to show gratitude* or *to thank* in Hebrew or Aramaic, such words as *love, praise, bless, glorify* were used to express thanks or gratitude. Thus “love him more” probably means *was more grateful/thankful*. Jesus sought to further disarm Simon by having him answer the parable.

7:43 Simon answered correctly. The one forgiven most will be most grateful.

7:44 You did not ... but she. Jesus now applied the parable. In the parable the behavior of the two debtors toward the moneylender is analogous to the behavior of Simon and the sinful woman’s behavior toward him.

You did not give me any water for my feet. While not mandatory, it would have been a kind gesture for Simon as the host to have had his servants wash the feet of his guest. Simon was not necessarily being rude in neglecting to do this, but he certainly did not go out of his way to show hospitality to Jesus.

7:45 You did not give me a kiss. A kiss was a common form of greeting, although not necessarily an expected act of courtesy. There are, however, worse things than not greeting someone with a kiss, as 22:47–48 clearly reveals.

7:46 You did not put oil on my head. It was also a kind gesture to anoint the head of one’s guest with olive oil. Whether this, the washing of feet, or giving a kiss were required acts of courtesy is uncertain, but it is evident that Simon in no way expressed any affection toward Jesus when he came to his home. On the other hand the woman did all three. It is unlikely that the actions of the woman were consciously done to redress Simon’s lack of affection.

7:47 Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven. This statement about her forgiveness can be understood in one of two ways. (1) Because of what she had done, her sins were now forgiven. That is, because the woman loved much, her sins were as a result forgiven. (2) Because of what she had done, I can now conclude that her sins had in fact been forgiven. That is, the woman’s attitude (as revealed in her loving much) was evidence that she had experienced forgiveness. The second explanation fits better the last statement in this verse and the context provided by 7:29–30. Thus “therefore” is best understood as going with “I tell you” rather than the statement about her sins being forgiven.

For she loved much. The “for” should not be understood in a causal sense. Her love was not the basis or ground for her forgiveness. It is better understood in the sense of “as evidenced by the fact that” or “thus we know.” Therefore “for she loved much” provides the evidence (not the cause) by which Jesus was able to conclude that the woman’s sins were forgiven. (Cf. 8:25 for a similar use of “for [*hoti*].”) As in 1 John 4:19, love was the result of forgiveness.

We are not told when or how the woman experienced forgiveness, and speculation on this (e.g., in Jesus’ synagogue preaching just before this or in Jesus’ preaching to the multitudes) is of little value.

But he who has been forgiven little loves little. As in the parable in which love (or gratitude) was the response to having one’s debt canceled, so here love is the result of having been forgiven. The tense of the verb “forgiven” also favors this since the perfect tense speaks of a past forgiveness the results of which extend into the present time. Some suggest that “has been forgiven” is a divine passive for “God has forgiven,” but Luke certainly did not understand it this way in 7:49. This last statement is the theoretical completion of Jesus’ parable. It completes the parable’s interpretation, but it should not be pressed to assume that Simon had also been forgiven but that his sins were less than the woman’s, so that he did not need as much gratitude.

7:48 Your sins are forgiven. Since the woman had, according to 7:47, already been forgiven of her sins, this statement serves as a word of assurance to her, namely, “Your sins have indeed been forgiven.”

7:49 Who is this who even forgives sins? From this verse it is clear that Jesus’ hearers (and Luke) did not understand the statements about forgiveness in 7:47–48 as divine passives, i.e., they were not an attempt to avoid God’s name by using the passive “you are forgiven” instead of “God forgives you.” On the contrary, Jesus is understood as exercising a divine prerogative and personally announcing, as in 5:20–21, that the woman’s sins were forgiven. See comments on 5:20.

7:50 Your faith has saved you. Through faith salvation came to the woman. Not because of her love but through faith the woman experienced the forgiveness of sins. Her love was a subsequent witness to her faith and forgiveness. The same statement is also found in 8:48; 17:19; 18:42.

Go in peace. Compare 8:48; Acts 16:36.

Several metaphors are used in our passage to describe the experience of salvation. One such metaphor is the “forgiveness of sins” (Luke 7:49). Another is the use of the verb “saved” (7:50), which is used some thirty times in Luke-Acts. Another metaphor found in this passage is the term “peace” (7:50).

The Lukan Message

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