



CAPITOL COMMISSION

The Overflow of Forgiveness (Luke 7:36-50)

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Jeff Whitebread / 484-680-4260 / Jeff.Whitebread@capitolcom.org

Jesus has just utilized a question by John the Baptist to teach about the radical difference between those who would follow him and those of the old order that was coming to a close. John had sought confirmation from Jesus about his messianic identity by asking, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" Beginning with this question Jesus calls John back to faith and challenges his preconceptions of the Christ's ministry. If John is willing to readjust his understanding of Jesus, he would be blessed; otherwise Jesus becomes offensive to all who are unable to make this fundamental shift. As he continues his teaching to the crowds he identifies John as the greatest prophet ever born of women; this is done to highlight the dramatic difference of those who belong to him. In Jesus the least is greater than the greatest OT prophet. The crowds, in hearing this, acknowledge God's plan because through John they found the Christ; however, in rejecting John's message, the majority of the religious establishment find Jesus offensive.

In this account Luke identifies two individuals which contrast the difference between life in Jesus and those without him. One had found forgiveness in Jesus in spite of her sinful history; and the other, being confident in his spiritual standing, finds Jesus lacking as a prophet. In this encounter Jesus' words come to mind, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." In reality every person is a sinner; however, until they view themselves in this light and accept the inadequacy of their own efforts for salvation, the gospel message holds no value for them. When comparing the skeptical approach of the Pharisee with the humility of the sinful woman, we see an example of one who saw the depth of her sin, clung to Jesus by faith, and lived in response to the forgiveness she had received. The apostle Paul also contrasts the Gentiles, who though they did not pursue righteousness have attained it, but Israel who pursued a law of righteousness had stumbled. The reason for both is faith in the Christ; the Gentiles found righteousness on the basis of faith in Jesus; while the Jews who rejected Jesus pursued a righteousness by works (Romans 9:30-32). In our culture that values self-reliance and self-importance, seeing one's need for a savior can be a foreign concept for most; and yet, without seeing the depth of our sin and our need for Jesus he will remain one of many competing interests in our lives. We, like this Pharisee will extend little love, because in our minds little was required to secure our salvation, as compared to other sinners.

Luke 7:36-50 - (36) One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. (37) And 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, (38) and 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. (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." (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." (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."

THE PHARISEE SIMON

One of the Pharisees asked to eat with him – We find this account starting normally enough, Jesus has been invited to the home of a Pharisee, whose name was Simon, for a meal. Upon arriving Jesus takes his place at the table. For a Pharisee to eat with Jesus shows enough trust in his ritual purity to share a meal with him. This has importance because Pharisees in Luke's narrative have already been presented as those who monitor legal observances and distance themselves from sinners. It also highlights the intrusion of this sinful woman's presence at this gathering from the Pharisaical perspective; given the purity attached to their meal practices. While the doors of a home in a Palestinian village would be open with anyone welcome to come in, her bold entrance into this meal was a contagion which this Pharisee monitored closely.

Now when the Pharisee saw this - In response to the woman's provocative display with Jesus, the Pharisee begins to question his credentials as prophet. While it's tempting to view Simon as a typical indictment upon all those in the Pharisaical order, Luke's rendering requires a more nuanced understanding of the situation. Jesus had just challenged John in the previous account to not be offended by him. Here we find a religious leader scandalized by Jesus' ministry. This temptation is not limited to the

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Pharisees and teachers of the law who rejected God's plan for themselves, but it extends to those who even held a position of importance in the messianic ministry. This Pharisee placed himself as judge over Jesus' action, as did John, and even Jesus' disciples; all of which required the Son of God to act in a manner acceptable to them. Sadly we also fall into the same trap. We are confronted with the reality of living in a broken and fallen world and long for things to be set back in order - the world purged of its impurity and an environment in which righteousness will flourish. Jesus challenges this mindset because what is at issue is not the world in which we live, but the condition of our heart in all our interactions.

THE SINFUL WOMAN

And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner – The account now makes a dramatic shift and this simple meal becomes a scandalizing affair for those in attendance. A sinful woman, who may have been a prostitute, enters this gathering where all know of her reputation. Overwhelmed by Jesus' presence she begins weeping uncontrollably as she stands over his feet. Unable to stop herself she lets down her hair and begins to wipe Jesus' feet and begins kissing them. She had brought with her a long-necked alabaster or glass bottle which contained ointment or perfume which she broke to anoint his feet. Within her cultural context – especially with women readily viewed as temptresses and/or sex objects – her actions on the whole would have been regarded as erotic. We see two contrasting perspectives to the woman's actions: Simon, who in witnessing this spectacle has serious reservations of Jesus' status as a holy man. On the other hand, Jesus is quite comfortable with what took place and uses this opportunity to deal with Simon's heart in correcting his perception on this woman.

Do you see this woman? – This woman's actions are not portrayed in this account as a substitute for Simon's lack of hospitality, but they are notable due to their extravagant nature. All of her actions are performed on Jesus' feet, the part of the body that was unseemly and unclean; this speaks clearly to the humility of her actions. By some her behavior was viewed as erotic and out of place; however, Jesus offers his own interpretation of the activities. In experiencing such forgiveness, she was able to respond with great love. That is, this outpouring of love for Jesus produced this tangible expression of her forgiveness. While the narrative does not address when she had been forgiven this is not odd; Luke occasionally introduces people into his gospel account who have already begun their journey of discipleship. What is clear is that this woman had already received forgiveness before this encounter. With this assurance of forgiveness, she is compelled to no longer

live for herself but for him who forgave her sins and would pay her penalty by his death on the cross. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

THE SAVIOR JESUS

Jesus answering said to him, Simon I have something to say to you. – Although Simon has not spoken a word audibly, Jesus answers his unspoken statement and engages in a personal dialogue. Simon responds by calling Jesus "teacher," a title of respect in Luke's narratives. When used in reference to Jesus it is normally reserved for those who were open to learn. In the parable of the canceled debts Jesus seeks to help Simon see the woman beyond her standing as a sinner, to see what she had become by experiencing forgiveness and belonging to him. As this parable is developed Simon admits that the one forgiven the larger debt will respond with more gratitude than the one who views the canceling of his debt as inconsequential. The issue at hand is not Simon's perceived "righteousness", nor the woman's obvious "sinfulness" but the debt each owes before a holy God. In not seeing the cost associated with paying his debt, Simon is unaware of his need for Jesus. In Simon we find an example of those who find Jesus acceptable, but only to the point that he fits their paradigm.

Your faith has saved you – This woman stands as an example of the wisdom and power of the gospel. She is a living and breathing illustration of one, who though least, has through Jesus become greater than John the Baptist. The amazing truth is that this greatness is not found in the woman but in the object of her belief. Luke is not celebrating the benefits of living a sinful and depraved life. What is on full display in this account is the sufficiency of Jesus to save all who come to him, no matter their debt; those who hope in Christ alone will be forgiven. It is her faith that saved her, her belief that acceptance by Jesus meant restoration to God. This acceptance then overflowed with a love for him that could not be contained. Her boldness, sacrifice, and humility are the by-products of one who could not do enough to express her love to Jesus. In contrast we find Simon stingy in his actions through failing to offer Jesus even the minimal level of hospitality. He was a man confident in his standing, and so, unable to grasp his deficiencies. Jesus is revealing that those who belong to him are aware of their need; acknowledge their unworthiness and comprehend the price paid to secure their salvation; they are those who live from the excess of forgiveness in their response to both God and their neighbor.