

IN LOVE WITH AN IDEA OR JESUS?

Luke 7: 36-50 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Today, in a word, God is showing us in Luke's Gospel, through a Pharisee's invitation of Jesus to his home, (1) the spiritual bankruptcy of Simon the Pharisee, a man thought to be very religious and near to God, who wasn't, (2) the wordless worship of an uninvited, unnamed sinful and immoral woman, and (3) the response of Jesus to a scorned and judged action by those thought to be religious, and His own acceptance of the open act of repentance, bathed in lavish love upon Jesus' feet. We can over-analyze this account and lose the message, and we can as the Pharisees did, we can "strain out the gnats, and swallow a camel. But I call us together to open our hearts, souls, minds, and spirits to what Jesus would have us learn in this mighty account of His being invited to Simon the Pharisees' home.

Our message today is God's head-on challenge to performance-based Christianity which is so present in our culture today. God's word takes on any efforts of any of us to think or say or prove that we can be saved by our good works. Jesus came incarnate into our world to expose you and me as sinners. When we come to faith in Jesus, repenting of our sins, many of us have the audacity to see ourselves as growing Christians, above obeying Jesus' Word, His Spirit, His will, and His way, for one reason. It sounds pitiful to say or think, but we as Christians can often feel in our particular situation, that we know better than our Master. I am reminded of Simon Peter who challenged Jesus when Jesus came to wash his feet. He said strongly, "You shall never wash my feet." When we read this in John 13: 5-10, we should see ourselves in Peter. Jesus told Peter, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." Seeing Peter had gone too far one way, he went too far the other way. He answered Jesus, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to Peter, "The one who is bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean."

We can see Peter, and his foolishness, but we can often fail to see how like Peter we all are. Peter was in love with the living God, with Messiah, Jesus, whom he testified Jesus was, the Son of God. But in practical living, Peter was far more culturally tied to own norms, his own comfort zone, and to his own ideas. As we seek to grow more and more in love with Jesus, ask yourself today, "Am I more in love with my idea of what a good Christian ought to be or do, or am I more in love with the living Lord Jesus Christ?"

Some of us are married. Are we exhausted in a performance-based marriage, accusing one another of not meeting our expectations? Are we more in love with our idea of what marriage should be, rather than being in love with our spouse? When we are demanding performance of our spouse, we need to watch out. Being in love with our idea of how marriage should work, means we are selfishly in love with ourselves. Simon, the Pharisee, as his fellow Pharisees, was in love with his idea of what faith in God and following God should be. In John 5: 36-47, Jesus explained to the Pharisees that their idea of what following God was, was blinding

them to the Father and His Son sent to save them. Listen to how the Pharisees were in love with their idea of following God, but not in love with God to follow Him. We read, “But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given Me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about Me that the Father has sent Me. And the Father who sent Me has Himself borne witness about Me. His voice you have never heard, His form you have never seen, and you do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe the One whom He has sent. You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me that you may have life. I do not receive glory from people. But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive Me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?”

There is Jesus' picture and depiction of Simon the Pharisee and his fellow Pharisees gathered at the dinner Simon was hosting with Jesus as his honored guest. Somehow many of us as born-again believers, do what the Galatian believers did. We grew up with a performance-based idea of Christianity. Somewhere along the way, we got the idea that Christianity stops at justification. No, no, no! Never! Sanctification, growing into holiness seems to have become our way to justify ourselves and live to keep others in line. At the heart of obedience to Christ is not performance, but love. Jesus said, in John 14: 15, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.” You say, “Isn't that performance?” No. Obedience is birthed, and it grows out of love, learning to walk with Jesus in a love and obedience relationship, in which our obedience grows out of our love for Him. This morning, this account of Jesus at the home of Simon the Pharisee, has three strong lessons to teach us. What are they? Lesson # 1 is about our misconception about others. Lesson # 2 is about our most common view of ourselves. Lesson # 3 is about our all too often view of our Lord Jesus. Let's follow our text.

OUR VIEW OF OTHERS IS OFTEN PERFORMANCE BASED. (I.) Notice Luke 7: 36-39. The way we see others is that too often, we look down on them, from our pedestal above them, and failing to see our own sin, we look down on them as vile sinners. This invitation of Jesus to dinner was a great thing Simon the Pharisee did. To have others over to our house for a meal is hospitality God loves to see in us. Do we know Simon's motives? We don't. When we are censorious in our spirits, we can conclude Simon was just a proud man looking for attention by throwing this party for Jesus. Simon may not fit that view. Simon could never have dreamed what would come at his dinner. None of us could ever know, nor could Simon have known what would happen next when God allows our good motives and good ideas to be challenged by what life brings. Here came this unexpected, uninvited guest, a woman who came up to where Jesus was laying on his left side

as was the custom, at a low table so he had his right hand free to eat. Jesus was facing Simon, but His feet lying away from the table were now being washed with this woman's tears, as she wept. Her profuse tears were the water she used to wash Jesus' unwashed dirty feet from walking the road. She had enough tears to wash Jesus' feet until the dirt came off and she let down her hair, which a woman was only supposed to do for her husband at home alone, and she was drying Jesus' feet with her long hair. Think of it! The only one who knew this was coming was Jesus.

The invitation of Jesus to dinner was lovely, but what was this? To Simon, he was mortified that this immoral woman ventured into his home and was washing and drying Jesus' feet. Simon appears to have wanted the silly nonsense stopped immediately. Yet, what an act of love it was, to think of coming to Jesus' feet in repentance and worship to wash His feet, to kiss His feet, to anoint them with perfume, and to wipe His feet dry with her hair! What a scene! It was one mighty act of repentance and love. Would you like to say to the woman, "I'll take it from here! Let me do the rest." Beloved, don't we love Jesus? If you had the chance to wash Jesus' feet and anoint them with perfume, wouldn't you? But Simon in his performance-based religious spirit of pride, would have none of it. Simon never spoke to his fellow Pharisees, but he thought to himself. "Now I know who Jesus is. If He were a true prophet, He would know the sort of woman this is who is touching him. Simon, in his performance-based religion, judged this woman in his heart as a sinner, and misjudged himself as not a sinner. A sinner-woman walked into a sinner-man's home and showed love to Jesus. Only one of the two sinners showed Jesus her love. One sinner judged the other sinner as unforgiveable. Worse, one sinner judged Jesus as not a true prophet. Have we found our idea of others to be like Simon's view—performance-based, maximizing others sin, and minimizing our own sin? God forbid it. God forgive us. Are we in love with an idea about ourselves that we are good, and that others are sinners, rather than being in love with Jesus, who loves us too, hell-bound sinners, just like all other sinners, until He saved us? Secondly,

OUR VIEW OF OURSELVES IS OFTEN NOT THAT WE ARE DEBTORS.

(II.) No one heard what Simon was thinking, but Jesus, Prophet, Priest, and King replied to Simon's unspoken thoughts as Jesus answered Simon and said to him in verse 40, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And Simon answered, "Say it, Rabbi, or Teacher." Jesus knew what Simon was thinking, and He knows what you are thinking about this self-examining message. Is that frightening to you? If you are willing to listen to what Jesus had to say to Simon, He has a response for you too, as He had for Simon. In vs.41-43. "A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." Now Jesus, turning from facing Simon, began to speak to the woman. Jesus words you and I need. Jesus said, verses 44-48, "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. You gave Me

no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss My feet. You did not anoint My head with oil, but she has anointed My feet with ointment. Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.” And He said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”

Simon did not see himself as sinner, but as righteous, and not as a debtor to God. In our consumer culture, our faith can quickly degenerate into a transaction-based faith. We trust not in the Lord, but in our prayer of repentance. How many professing believers walk around with a fire insurance mentality with God, saying “I got saved years ago, and that’s enough.” Jesus would say to millions in our country today, “Are you in love with an idea of what salvation is, “something you do,” performance based, and not based on being a debtor to Christ and His cross, in love and growing in Jesus, who alone saves, keeps, and satisfies our souls? Jesus Himself warned His disciples about being in love with an idea of salvation that denies living for Christ as Lord. In Matthew 7: 21-23, Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. On that Day, many will say to me, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and cast out demons in Your name, and do many mighty miracles in Your name?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness.” The bad news for Pharisees that Jesus associates with sinners, was good news to this woman, because she was a debtor to Jesus, for she knew she was a sinner.

Simon was more interested in passing judgment on this woman and on Jesus, than he was conscious of Jesus’ judgment of him. Simon felt his home was too righteous to have in it sinners like this woman, and he felt more righteous for not wanting sinners like her, in his home. Churches can feel this same way. Simon saw immorality as an awful sin in God’s eyes, unforgiveable, but his pride was acceptable. When we want to keep sinners out, we need as true debtors, sinners saved by grace, to know that Jesus welcomes sinners to come to Him. Debtors to Jesus know worship is for sinners, both in Old Testament and New Testament times. Debtors to Jesus know worship takes place at the feet of Jesus, where we are preoccupied with loving Him. Debtors to Jesus want to love him and others as He loved us. Debtors to Jesus know our love involves our emotions. We are not just intellectual beings, for His great command is to love Him with all our heart, our souls, our mind, and our strength. True debtors to Jesus are not easily hindered from worship. This woman probably felt scorn in that dining hall, that hypocrites were there, but she kept on lavishing her love on Jesus. When we acknowledge how much we have been forgiven, we will love much, both God and others.

When was the last time you were so moved by your sins, as this woman, that you wept and weep over your sin? Does the Word of the Lord stir your soul to tears? When you heard Pastor Larry read this story, were you moved, or was it mundane? Are you expressive of your love for Jesus, and for others? Pharisees are not moved by the love of God for them as sinners, because they either deny being a sinner or they minimize their sin. When we as debtors are forgiven for much, we love much.

OUR VIEW OF JESUS IS OFTEN QUESTIONING HIM, NOT

WORSHIPPING HIM. (III.) Notice Simon and his fellow guests in Luke 7: 49.

“Then those who were at table with Jesus began to say among themselves, “Who is this, who even forgives sins?” Jesus furthered their understanding of Him by saying directly to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” When Jesus saw in this woman’s wordless actions, a repentant, believing, and receiving heart, even without words, He said to her, in verse 48, “Your sins are forgiven.” Jesus saw this woman had come with a heart of confessing sadness and repentance for her past life. The same Lord who could read Simon’s mind, could read this sinful woman’s mind. He could read and respond to her plea for mercy as she poured out her tears and love. What a grand ending, you may say. This isn’t the end. Now we have the full picture of what the whole dining hall was thinking of Jesus. “Who is this man who claims to forgive sins?” Do you want to part company with this crowd of Pharisees? Do you want to kneel at Jesus’ feet and weep with this woman? Yet, are some of us ready to judge Jesus, because this woman never prayed verbally a sinner’s prayer like the guilty tax-collector, who said, “God be merciful to me a sinner, or like the thief on the cross, prayed, “Lord remember me when You come into Your kingdom.”? Are we fixed on our idea of the need for a verbal sinner’s prayer, spoken in repentance and faith, so that this account of Jesus forgiving this woman messes up our paradigm? Jesus saved and forgave this woman, whose only plea of repentance and faith was her act of love. Do we dare say what comes to our mind, “Why, Jesus, did You forgive this immoral woman without asking her for words of repentance and faith in Simon’s house?” Do we question what Jesus did, how He did it, what He said and did? Do we question God on how He leads us or others, and what He wants us or others to do? Do we question our Master rather than to rejoice in His ways, which are past finding out?

Jesus never addressed the questions of Simon’s other guests, but He punctuated His earlier words of forgiveness, by His even deeper words of forgiveness, saying to her, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” Have we, like the church in Ephesus, left our first love? Do we actually question whom Jesus reaches out to, tax collectors, publicans, and immoral sinners? Would we think the same thing Simon thought had we been there, watching what this immoral woman did, as Martin Luther put it, wetting Jesus’ feet with her “heart water?” Are we, like Simon, who never showed Jesus the common courtesy of washing his feet, and who never gave Him the customary greeting of a kiss, and never anointed his head with oil? If we were asked to write down our sins Jesus has saved us from, would it be hard to fill a page? Without knowing our debt to Jesus, how can we love Him much, because we don’t see ourselves being saved from many sins? To love Jesus because we know we are forgiven, is a blessed response to grace. Luke omitted this woman’s name which helps us identify with her in our repentance to Jesus. Jesus never stopped this woman’s love. He won’t stop our love. We all have much to be forgiven. If we want to be forgiven, only He can do it. Accepting Jesus forgiveness is an act of faith. Understanding His forgiveness increases our ability and capacity to love Him and others. Who are you, a little or a big sinner? Jesus paid it all, the whole price. How can we help but love Him with all our whole being, at His feet?