

## Love for Christ

Luke 7:36-50

By Billy Dempsey

I would invite you to turn in your Bibles to Luke chapter 7. We will be looking at the end of that chapter beginning with verse 36; verses 36 to 50. I'll be honest with you, I am hesitant to preach this sermon, but however, if the Reverend Lowry were to read it, it would be a masterpiece, wouldn't it? I'm telling you, that man can read! The only difficulty with persuading him to do that is there are no gigantic Hebrew place-names here in this sermon. It would be quite a boring exercise for him! We'll save his verbal masterpieces for times like that. Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Father, thank You for Your Word, that it's real and true, it reveals Your own heart and mind. Who is a God like You, who has spoken in such a way to reveal Himself? And now our Father, You are the One we need to hear from. Open our minds and our hearts and indeed help us lay every distraction and stray thought aside and give our reverent and humble attention to what Your Word says to us this day. Bless us, speak to us, feed us. We make our prayer in Jesus' name and for His sake, amen.*

Let me begin reading with verse 36 of Luke chapter 7:

One of the Pharisees asked him (that is, Jesus) to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. 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, 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. Now when the Pharisees 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." And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher."

"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." Then he turned toward the woman and 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. 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 has loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little" And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

All men are like grass and all their glory is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower falls, but the Word of our God stands forever.

J.C. Ryle said that "grateful love is the secret of doing much for Christ." Following our Missions Conference last week, perhaps we have renewed thoughts of doing much for Christ - more praying, more giving, more going. We've got folks on the other side of the country today, folks in Chicago today. Maybe we're thinking more about going across the street or across the office or across to the other side of the world. Those are the thoughts that I hope we're entertaining right now after such stirring testimony and gripping challenge as we had last week in our Missions Conference, from this pulpit and from Sunday School lecterns all across our church and body. But as Ryle said, grateful love is the secret. More good works, more self denial, more daily open and practical obedience to Christ's commands - what will produce and sustain those kind of things? Love will. Listen to this further quote from Ryle. "There will never be more done for Christ until there is more hardy love to Christ Himself. The fear of punishment, the desire of reward, the sense of duty - all are useful to persuade men and women to holiness but they are all weak until we love Christ. Once that mighty principle gets hold of us, we see a whole life changed." I think Luke tells us something of what love for Christ looks like. I've got two points this morning in my sermon, but no, you're not getting out of here early. Two points this morning that Luke shows us in this narrative what love for Christ looks like, and then that Luke shows us what the foundation of that love for Christ is.

### **What Does Love for Christ Look Like?**

Let's look first of all at what love for Christ looks like. The narrative that we've read this morning from the end of Luke 7 brings before us two people with very different responses to Christ. One, a Pharisee named Simon who has invited Jesus into his home for a meal. The other, an unnamed woman known locally as a sinner who accords to Jesus an amazing and dramatic display of deep, deep affection. What does love for Christ look like? Well Simon gives us no help. He

has an interest of some type in Jesus, enough to invite Him to come to his home for a meal, but as Jesus points out, not enough of an interest to show Him the common courtesies of the day. Did you pick that up in verses 44, 45, 46? "You gave me no water for my feet, you gave me no kiss, you did not anoint my head with oil." In a culture which valued elaborate hospitality, and does so even to this day, Simon's behavior constitutes a serious breach, a shabby treatment, of a guest under his roof.

Maybe curiosity is more precisely a word to describe Simon's interest in Jesus. He seems very curious about whether Jesus is more than a talented rabbi. He wants to determine if He's a prophet. As the sinful woman, remember, is busy weeping over Jesus' feet and wiping them with her loosened hair and anointing them with expensive perfume and kissing them, Simon is watching and he's making his decision about Jesus. Remember that from verse 39? "If this man were a prophet he would know who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." You see, Simon thinks that he and Jesus share the same values. He's about to be surprised. And let's stop right there and recognize that you and I have the same tendency to remake Jesus into our image, the image of our values, the image of the way we think, the image of our commitments and our attitudes. Let's beware of that, because Jesus will remake us to conform to His image instead.

Well what about this unnamed woman? Does she show us what it looks like to love Jesus? I believe she does. She's extravagant in her display. Does the Scripture call us to that kind of open, over the top display of love and affection for Jesus? Well if you go home this afternoon and you read the worship scenes from Revelation chapter 5 and Revelation chapter 7, I think you find much the same attitude in place. It's extravagant praise. It's demonstrative worship -elders and saints and angels falling on their face before the Lamb who was slain. Heaven rings with shouts and praises. It's quite a scene, just like what we see here in Luke chapter 7 is quite a scene. I think there's a lot of similarity there, but let's look, let's look more closely at what this woman does and find out what we can pull from her practice here that we can take for our own good.

### **Love for Christ is Grateful**

First of all let's notice this, that Jesus makes the connection between love and gratitude. He does so in the illustrative story that He tells Simon in verses 41 and 42 - the moneylender with the two debtors, one owing five hundred denarii, that's five hundred days' wages, and the other owing fifty denarii, or fifty days' wages. Neither could pay his debt and the moneylender cancelled the debt of each man. Jesus asked Simon, "Which of the will love Him more?" to which Simon replies, "The one for whom he cancelled the larger debt." You see Jesus, right there, links love with gratitude. Her love in particular that's so obviously on display in that dinner at Simon's house. Her love, Jesus says, is born of gratitude. It's a

grateful love because her debt has been cancelled. It's a grateful love but it's also a humble love. Notice that the narrative shows us that she's busy at Jesus' feet. She's behind Him. She's not requiring that Jesus give her His attention. She's not demanding anything, in fact, of Him. She simply wants to do something for Him, something to honor Him, something that in some way communicates her love for Him because of what He's done for her. I don't believe she planned to come wash His feet with her tears. She did plan to come and anoint His feet or anoint Him in some way with the perfume, the ointment that she's brought with her. But in that moment, she's overwhelmed, she's overwhelmed by what He's done for her. Her heart overflows. Luther calls her tears, "heart water." Her heart overflows with gratitude, quite unexpectedly I think. The teardrops falling on Jesus' feet and her busily brushing them away with her loosened hair gives that affect of her washing His feet with her tears.

### **Love for Christ is Humble and Sacrificial**

There's something else about her love and her loving display that we need to understand. It's humble but it's also sacrificial. In Jesus' day, perfumes and scented oils and ointments were very much valued. They're very much valued today. We spend a lot of money to smell good and they did in Jesus' day as well. They spent a lot of money to smell good. Balsam, for example, could cost quite a large sum of money. The alabaster flask that Luke mentions here indicates that this ointment is costly indeed. For that ointment to be used, this woman has to break the neck of that flask so that the whole of it would be used. There's no keeping any for later. There's no saving back. It all went for Jesus' pleasure. All of it. The whole flask was her gift of love for Him. That's what grateful love does. It pushes us to great lengths, to extravagant displays, to sacrificial ends. We might look to some people as though we've lost our minds. People might tell us things like, "You give too much money to the church" or "You give too much money to missions." Or they might ask you a question like this, "Does everything always have to do with Jesus for you?" If we love Jesus, it seems like everything does have to do with Jesus for us. That grateful, sacrificial, humble love pushes us to cross racial lines, it pushes us to cross employer-employee lines, and we begin to see, perhaps, to see the people who work for us not just as workers there to meet a quota or accomplish a task but we begin to see them as whole people the way Jesus does, people who have needs. And maybe their utmost need is to know the Savior. And we begin to pray for them, "Lord, how might I show in a way that's appropriate, how might I show this person the love of Christ? How might I talk to this employee of mine about the Gospel and the claims of Christ? What might You do in his or her soul?" That's pushing across lines that we tend to not want to go against.

Or maybe we have, on the other side of that equation, we've got a boss that's a monster and we begin to recognize that's a person with needs. That person has tremendous pressure in his or her life. That person needs a Savior. You see,

sacrificial, grateful love of Christ begins to help us see that person as a whole person the way Jesus does. We begin to pray for that individual, begin to look for ways to demonstrate the love of Christ, begin to look for ways to bring the Christ whom we love so much into some kind of appropriate conversation to our setting. You see, a grateful, humble, sacrificial love for Christ pushes us places that we might not choose to go by ourselves. It might push us across the room of a divided home where we'd see a spouse or a child and we'd say, "I'm sorry. What can we do to move forward? I'm sorry. It was my fault. I was wrong. How do we go from here?" You see, that's what grateful, humble, sacrificial love for Christ does. It makes us go places that we would not choose to go; it makes us see things that perhaps we don't really want to see. It causes us to take extravagant action as we see this unnamed lady taking.

### **Forgiven: Our Foundational State for Loving Christ**

What's the fuel? What's the foundation? Where does that kind of love for Christ come from? Maybe we just have a simple personality difference between two people - one a more reserved, suspicious type who doesn't trust many people at all until they prove themselves; the other a wide-open, gregarious person of warm heart and easy trust who loves Jesus in a big way because she loves everybody in a big way. Look at what Jesus says in verses 44 and following. He says, in pointing out her actions, He says, "She has wet my feet with her tears. She has wiped them with her hair. From the moment I came in, she has not ceased to kiss my feet. 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." Jesus is pointing out the extravagance of the way she has treated Him and He explains that she loves much because her many sins have been forgiven. Simon doesn't appear to recognize himself to be a sinner, doesn't appear to be one who thinks he's anything but a good man. This woman is known as a sinner and she knows herself to be a sinner with many sins. Again, note the humility with which she deals with Jesus. She doesn't even want her tears to defile Him. That's why she's wiping them off with her hair. She knows herself to be a great sinner, but she knows herself to be one who's been forgiven. There's the fuel for her devoted, extravagant love. She knows what sin has done to her and now she knows what it is to be forgiven. Her debt is cancelled. She's free. She's free from sin's guilt; she's free from sin's power.

### **Recognize Your Need for Jesus**

If you and I are to love Christ the way this woman does, then we've got to go where she's been. We've got to recognize what sin has done to us and how deep is our need of a Savior, even those of us whose testimony is, "I've never known a time when I didn't trust Jesus as my Savior," that sweetest of all testimonies, even those with that testimony have to come to grips with what sin has done to

us. It's ruined us, it's broken us, it's twisted us, it's blinded us, it's killed us, it's darkened our minds, it's made our hearts deceitful and wicked. We need to think of sin the way the Bible describes it - as wickedness, which is depravity and malice. The Bible describes sin as transgression, a willful revolt, a breaking away from authority, a treachery, a crossing of a boundary, a known boundary. The Bible describes sin as iniquity, a craving, a violating, a crookedness. What does the Bible say about us as sinners? Isaiah 64 says even our righteousness, even the things we've done right and we want to point to, even our righteousness is filthy, like filthy rags. It's polluted. Our good things, our obedience, is polluted. Psalm 51, David in his great psalm of repentance, is saying that sin's pervasive ruling begins at our conception. "In sin," he says, "did my mother conceive me." God, in Genesis 6, surveys the whole of mankind and He says, "Every intention of their heart is only evil all the time." You know what He's saying? He's saying sin saturates every pocket of our personality and character. Nothing escaped the stain and pollution of sin. Romans 5 says that in sin we were God's enemies. Romans 1 says in sin we were haters of God. Ephesians 2 says we were dead in our trespasses and sins. Chapter 4, Paul says our minds were darkened and we were alienated from the life of God.

Someone told me after the eight-thirty service that he feels like he's yawned through much of his Christian life because he's lost sight of these kinds of Biblical descriptives of what it means to be a sinner, what it means to be broken by sin and be ruined by sin. That's a reminder that we need to have. What does it mean to be a sinner? What does it mean to be at one time held captive by sin? When we begin to see what Jesus forgave us of, we love Him. When we begin to gain a sense of how deep is the canyon that sin has dug in our souls and we know His forgiveness, we love Him. When we begin to survey the wreckage that sin has made in our character and we know His forgiveness, we love Him. That understanding is the difference between the Pharisee named Simon and this unnamed woman. He thinks he's better than she, that he's more righteous than she. He believes that she's the sinner in the room. She believes that she's the worst sinner there. Simon believes he's righteous. He doesn't see the truth that sin has ruined him. This woman loves Jesus more than she can give words to because He's delivered her from darkness into light. She had heard of Him, no doubt, and heard of the things that He had said and done. Perhaps she even heard the words that He had spoken earlier in the day, "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Maybe she had heard that.

In His kindness, Jesus states openly what she already knows to be true. He says, "Your sins are forgiven. Your faith," He doesn't say, "Your act," because what we see is the result of her forgiveness; it's not the ground of it. He says, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace." She enjoys what is unimaginable to Simon and his other guests - the forgiveness of many sins and the peace with God forgiveness brings. What about us? What about us this morning? Are we

one of those who feels like other people are the sinners? We're pretty nice people and we've got things pretty well figured out and we're okay? Then we're sitting right in Simon's chair and we're failing to see the brokenness that sin has brought to us and made of us. This is the day to take stock and to begin and let those Biblical categories take root in our hearts and minds and let those Biblical categories talk to us about who we are and our need of the work that Jesus does for broken sinners like us. Maybe we're like that individual that talked to me after eight-thirty, yawning through our Christianity, because we need a reminder of what it is to be a sinner, what it is to be broken. We need a reminder of what Jesus has forgiven us of and freed us from. We need a reminder that the Gospel, the Gospel saves sinners and Jesus came to save broken souls like us. We love Him more, we love Him more as we see more clearly what we were, as we see more clearly what sin had done to us. The more we know Him, I'm convinced, the more clearly we know ourselves, including the brokenness we still live with, the more we love Him. Don't let this day pass, especially, especially if you don't trust Christ, don't let this day pass before you hear again what Jesus says to the woman. "Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace." That can be your benediction as well. Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Father, thank You for sending Your Son as Savior who saves to the uttermost, a Savior who completes the work of salvation, a Savior who saves broken and ruined souls, people who are captive and slaves to sin, people who are dead in their sin. Jesus saves them and brings them to life again. Thank You, our Father, for being that kind of a God - not who saves good people but who saves sinners and those ruined by the fall. Hear us, receive our thanks, and help us be mindful of what it is that You have delivered us from in Christ that we may love Him more deeply and more sweetly. Thank You, our Father. We make our prayer in Jesus' name and for His sake. Amen.*

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