**Jesus’ Grace Produces Love**

Luke 7:36-50

Key Verse 7:47 **Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven – for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little**

Last week we gained a sense of God’s history. Where Jesus restores our life to God’s image, there is the kingdom of God. Whoever responds to the good news of Jesus will become a history maker for God.

Today’s passage is about the heart of the gospel of Jesus. Here, we meet two kinds of people: a woman who had lived a sinful life, but responded to the good news of Jesus; and a Pharisee, who was self-righteous and had a problem with the good news of Jesus. As we study the passage, we may question ourselves: How do we respond to the good news of Jesus? Do we appreciate the grace of Jesus? May God help us to appreciate his grace!

**1. A sinful woman came to Jesus**

Look at verse 36. *“Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee’s house and reclined at the table***.**” It was quite rare for Jesus to be invited to a Pharisee’s house for dinner. As we already studied, most of the Pharisees opposed Jesus from the start of his ministry. Instead of accepting God’s life-giving work through Jesus, they began to raise theological arguments against Jesus. They especially criticized Jesus for eating and drinking with sinners such as tax collectors and healing the sick on the Sabbath.

The text doesn’t say anything about why this Pharisee invited Jesus. However, it is evident that he did not invite Jesus with pure motives; his basic attitude was skeptical and critical. He probably wanted to check out Jesus for himself and find out something wrong about him. Jesus accepted the invitation and went to his house to dine with him.

In that culture, the way they had dinner was to recline at the table. They did not sit on chairs like we do. The guests were arranged around a very low table. They reclined on their left arm which was supported by cushions, leaving their right hand free to eat with. They would have removed their sandals, and their feet would have been stretched out behind them, with some space between their feet and the walls so that those serving the meal could bring the various dishes to the table.

Look at verse 37. The evangelist Luke draws our attention to a woman. “*A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume*.” Surely this woman had not been invited to the dinner. In the town, she was looked down upon as a sinner. We are not told what kind of sinner she was. In the context of those times she probably was a prostitute like the wayward woman in John chapter 4 who had 5 husbands and who was also living with a man; or she could have been an adulteress like the woman who was caught in the act of adultery in John chapter 8. We don’t know how she came to live such a sinful lifestyle. Yet there is something we can say about this woman. Her self-image was tattered, ragged, and ruined. She has been spat upon and cursed at. She was known as a sinner like the adulterous woman in “The Scarlet Letter” by Nathaniel Hawthorne. She became an example that many mothers in town used to warn their daughters. Inwardly, she was broken, wounded, and bleeding with feelings of guilt and self-condemnation. She was lost and there was no hope for her. There was no human remedy, no human solution for her wounded soul and life.
Verse 37 says that she learned that Jesus was eating at a Pharisee’s house and she brought an alabaster jar of perfume. Imagine a notorious sinner in a prominent Pharisee’s house! What a strange picture that was!

It would have been risky for a public sinner to go there because she did not belong there. She might very well have been ridiculed and condemned. It took a lot of courage and boldness for this woman to go to the Pharisee’s house. But she had to meet Jesus. Surely she heard the news that Jesus welcomed sinners and ate with tax collectors. She heard the news that Jesus healed people with leprosy and those who were paralyzed. She heard the news that Jesus raised to life a widow’s son. She heard that Jesus turned away no one who came to him. This was really good news to her. She could see light shining and reaching out to her dark soul when she heard the news of Jesus. She saw that everything is possible with God in Jesus. Yes, she could start all over again. This is true for us, too. Some people desire to start over again, but do not have the assurance that it can be done. But there is hope in Jesus. No matter how dark or hopeless or confused our life seems to be, Jesus is always there; he is waiting for us to lead us out of our darkness and to give us new life.

Look at verse 38. “*and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them*.”

This woman was not invited to the dinner, but she crashed it. I think this narrative counts as one of the most dramatic and moving actions in the New Testament. The woman stood behind Jesus because of the way they were reclining at the table. There, she stood and wept many tears. She cried so much that her tears began to wet Jesus’ feet. She then wiped his feet with her hair. She did not think about the fact that she was ruining and messing up her hair as she was doing this.

She did not stop there. She then began to kiss his feet, dirt and all. Usually the host would kiss his guest on the cheek. If child greeted a parent or a student greeted a rabbi, a kiss on the hand was in order. But this woman kissed his feet and then poured perfume on them. This perfume might have been very expensive and valuable to her. We can see that this woman did not spare anything in giving to Jesus. She poured out her tears, wiped his feet with her hair, kissed his feet, and then poured out this expensive perfume. All these happened because her heart was so full of repentance and gratitude to Jesus. It was an expression of her love for Jesus. It was a spiritual act of worship.

However, to Jesus, it would not have been easy to accept such a woman at a dinner surrounded by the social elite. It might have been embarrassing for Jesus or for anyone who was eating with him. Jesus was sure to be misunderstood and criticized. Yet Jesus did not rebuke her or criticize her for her actions nor turn her away. Rather, he allowed her to express her affection to the full. Everyone else despised this woman, but Jesus did not. Jesus accepted her broken and contrite heart. This is the big heart of God. Jesus compassionately welcomes sinners who come to him; he is like the father of the prodigal son in Lk15.Psalm 51:17 says, “*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise****.*”** The Lord does not drive us away when we come to him with a broken and humble heart.

**2. Jesus teaches the grace of God (39-50)**

But now let’s turn to the host of the dinner, Simon the Pharisee. Verse 39, “*When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, ‘If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is – that she is a sinner’.*” Simon was shocked by what he saw! His jaw fell and his eyes looked like they were about to pop out. If Jesus was a holy man of God, he would not allow himself to be touched by such a sinful woman and become unclean. It was a self-righteous Pharisee mentality: Public sinners were to be shunned, like men with leprosy. They knew well how to isolate people, cut them off, and despise them. When Jesus did not act like a Pharisee, Simon rejected Jesus’ authority and spirituality. Because he accepted sinners, Jesus was criticized, rejected and insulted by the prominent people of this world. Jesus is different from proud men.

Jesus knew Simon’s dark thinking and challenged his false theology and judgment. Jesus told him a short parable. Verses 40-43 are about 2 debtors and a money lender.

In this parable, two men had debts to a certain money lender. One owed 500 denarii, the other 50. One denarius was a coin worth about a day’s wages. So this was a twenty-month debt versus a two-month’s debt. But neither of them was able to pay back the debt. They both faced the same fate – to lose all they had and to go to jail. Incredibly, the moneylender decided to cancel their debts. They both received something they did not deserve, that is, grace. He unconditionally forgave their debts. He canceled their debts.

Jesus asked Simon the Pharisee: Now which of them will love him more? Little-debt or big-debt? Jesus’ parable sounds unusual and strange because we do not expect to find such a generous money lender in this world. Simon sensed that he might be stepping into a trap. Anyway, he gave the correct answer: “I suppose it would be Big-debt.” And Jesus answered him, “You have judged correctly.”

Now Jesus compares Simon to the woman. Look at verses 44-47: “*Then he turned towards 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. 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. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven – for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little*.”

Jesus’ point is the relation between God’s mercy and our response. The greater our sense that God has dealt with us in mercy, the greater love we will have for him. If our love for God is cold, it may well be because we have come to think he owes it to us to have mercy on us. Simon thought he was good and righteous because he was a Pharisee. Because of his attitude, he could not know the heart and love of God. In fact, Simon was very cold-hearted. This woman, however, knew she was a great sinner who could not do anything to free herself from the debt of sin. She knew that she needed Jesus and Jesus alone. She accepted Jesus’ forgiveness of all her sins. She wept many tears. These tears were the tears of repentance and gratitude. She cried so much, out of thanksgiving to Jesus who forgave all her sins. She kissed his feet and poured perfume on them. She lavished love upon Jesus in her actions. Those who have received more grace love Jesus more.

In our society, people frequently get into credit card debt, especially young people. It is a real burden to be in debt of any kind, be it credit card, school loans for financial aid or personal loans. The gospel is like a banker walking up to you when you cannot pay your mortgage; rather than foreclosing, he writes a check that pays off the debt. If you met a banker like that, you would always be grateful to him and tell your friends about him. God is that spiritual banker, who showers such incredible mercy upon us. He has paid our debt of sin through Jesus. The deeper we realize that he has dealt with us in mercy, the greater will be our response of love. It is dangerous to see ourselves as “little sinners” as the Pharisee did.

The Apostle Paul never forgot that we all started out at the same place, in need of divine forgiveness. Paul as a Pharisee had been a violent man, a murderer and persecutor of the Christians. He thought he was righteous, but after he met Jesus, his life turned 180 degrees around. He never forgot how great Jesus’ grace was towards him. He says in 1Tim1:15-17, “*Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life*.”

His gratitude to God translated into compassion for others. And this response to Jesus’ grace was shown in his humble attitude. He said in 1 Cor15:9-10, “*For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No. I worked harder than all of them – yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me***.**”

Verse 48: Then Jesus said to her, “***your sins are forgiven***.” Jesus proclaimed forgiveness of her sins. In this way Jesus confirmed forgiveness of her sin. This amazed the guests who were there. Jesus said also in verse 50, “***Your faith has saved you; go in peace***.” Jesus credited her faith for her salvation. Now she could live a new life saved from all broken relationships. She became like a princess in the heavenly kingdom. She changed from a source of shame into a source of blessing. Jesus’ grace is always available. It changed many of us here to live a blessed life in Jesus. Jesus’ grace can still change young college students through Bible study. Those who claim this grace by faith receive salvation. What a relief it is to have our sins forgiven! What a great burden has been removed! It is by Jesus’ wounds, by his shed blood on the cross, that we are forgiven.

In conclusion, we can come to Jesus by faith. Do you appreciate Jesus’ grace? How have you responded to it? What will you do? Jesus does not despise our broken and contrite hearts. Let’s accept that our debts have been canceled by Jesus. This grace is freely given, but it is most costly and precious. It leads us to love Jesus with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. May God help us to appreciate his grace and claim a wonderful new beginning in Jesus!