

Forgiveness and Love – Part 2

Last week we explored the beginning of this story to gain understanding of the location, customs and audience. Reading beginning in verse 36, “**One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee’s house and reclined at 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 ...”** This brings us to the point of where the story becomes amazing – this “**woman of the city**” has entered unnoticed but cannot contain herself. She begins to weep for she is overwhelmed with who she is, with her sin and with her new relationship with God. I believe she is also saddened with the lack of respect this Pharisee has given to Jesus. He invited Jesus to his home with the motive of building evidence against him by probing for answers to be used against him. The Pharisee had no intention of honoring Jesus otherwise he would have treated him with honor by offering water to wash his feet and oil for his head. The sinful and broken woman as she observes what is taking place sees that Jesus’ feet are dusty. At this time in Israel this was a social disgrace to bring someone into your home and not make it possible for them to wash their feet. One removed their sandals upon entering the home. This reminds me of when Jesus was going to wash the disciple’s feet. Peter speaks up, I love Peter because he rushes ahead before he thinks, at times, just like me. Peter responds to Jesus saying, “**Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!**” ¹⁰ **Jesus said to him, “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean...”** (John 13:9-10) One’s body could be clean and yet their feet would be dusty from walking in sandals.

So, this woman finds Jesus reclined at the table with his sandals removed and would have had her face turned downward to hide her tears, this enables her to easily see that his feet are not washed. She has no water but she does have tears streaming down her face, so she moves a little closer and uses her tears to wet Jesus' feet and begins washing away the dust and dirt. Her behavior would now be noticed. Her behavior is so incredible that the host and those at the table would have been stunned and may not have known how to react.

Luke writes in verse 38, “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...” Interestingly it says, “she began to wet his feet” the Greek word *brecho* means to rain or wash. Literally her tears are raining down on Jesus' feet as she washes them. This is not a quiet weeping, but a heart-felt pouring out of emotion that would have been noticed by many. I do not know if you have ever weep with the intensity Luke says she wept with – I have and it is a mixture of draining emotion, release and physical exhaustion.

Here she is weeping with great emotion, with tears raining down on Jesus' feet and she has no towel. Jewish women kept their hair up or covered in public and this woman takes her hair down and begins to wipe away the dust turned to mud by her tears with her hair. For a woman to let down her hair in public like this could be considered grounds for divorce for the shame it would bring upon her husband – however this woman had no husband. She was not thinking of social norms but she is there pouring out her heart and emotions because of grieving over her sin and being in the presence of the Messiah. As her tears washed his feet and her hair wiped away the muddy dust of the day, she does something even more amazing, more shocking, she “kissed his feet”.

This woman is so swept up in emotion and affection for her Messiah, she weeps, raining down upon Jesus' feet, then she wipes them dry and finally she embraces his feet and begins kissing them. The word used here and translated as "kissed" is *kataphileō* and it is an intense word. We find the same word used in chapter 15, verse 20 where Luke records Jesus telling the story of the prodigal. When that father saw his son returning far off, he ran to his son, fell on his neck, hugging and embracing and kissing his son. It is a scene of great emotion and affection. Jesus was most likely the only one who understood what was going on for he planned this encounter so that he could teach and expose the heart of the Pharisee. This woman does not just give Jesus' feet a quick kiss but she embraces his feet and continues to kiss them and shows abandonment for this setting in the Pharisee's house and she loves her Savior. I do not know about you, but this scene in my mind's image is incredible. People in shock, not knowing what to do, conversations erupting and people pressing to try and see, and Jesus is calm.

Now comes the last act of love, the great generosity with the anointing of the feet with costly ointment. I do not know if she was unable to reach Jesus' head or if she was caught up in the emotion as she had washed, dried and kissed Jesus' feet – she opens the alabaster flask and anoints his feet. Let pause for a moment to understand this was a difficult situation; Jesus is considered a rabbi and spiritual teacher and this woman is most likely a prostitute who began crying and washing his feet with her tears. Then she shamefully lets down her hair to dry his feet. She is touching him, an unmarried man and embracing and showing affection. Finally, she pours out expensive ointment – this is a serious breach of social norms on a number of levels. The people gathered, I am sure, were asking how does this prostitute dare touch this rabbi? Do they know each other? How could a rabbi let this shameless woman touch him if they did not know each other? People are trying to make connections and their imaginations are running hard.

In verse 39 Simon the Pharisee responds, “*he says 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.’*” He is thinking this in his mind, but Jesus knows. This is a fascinating thing that Luke records. Here is Simon the Pharisee, who wants to get Jesus to say something that can be used against him. He is not Jesus’ friend, and yet, he cannot bring himself to think that Jesus, a teacher or prophet, could be familiar with a prostitute. He is not accusing Jesus, he is confused as to what is happening. This Pharisee might be thinking Jesus does not know what kind of person this woman is - otherwise he would not allow her to touch him. This Pharisee does not jump to thinking Jesus is evil and he can use this exchange against him. He might think if Jesus does not know who this woman is – it proves his is not a prophet, but he does not move to think Jesus is a man who is a sinner on the level of this woman. This situation is all wrong. This scene further convinces Simon that Jesus is not a prophet, but just as this thought is solid in his mind – Jesus speaks to the thoughts of Simon.

Jesus invades Simon’s thoughts and self-dialog. In verse 40 Jesus speaks, “*Simon, I have something to say to you.*” Simon is brought back into the present by Jesus’ words and responds, “*Say it, Teacher.*” Simon’s response is respectful but he does not respect the one he is calling “*Teacher*”. I have had that type of response from my children, at times, when they were teenagers. Jesus begins to teach and make his point with a parable – Jesus used parables often because they illustrated ideas in a way that makes the idea understandable. Jesus says in verse 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?*” Nice story, it would be like the loan company calling you and saying we have decided to forgive the loan balance on your car and we are sending you the title. Now, that would impact your life and help your

monthly cash flow. All those near are focused on this woman at Jesus' feet and Jesus tells this story that on the surface has nothing to do with what is going on. Simon must have thought, what are you talking about? I prefer the wording for verse 42 from New American Standard translation, "When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?" The word here translated, "cancelled or graciously forgave," is *charizomai*, which includes the word *charis* meaning grace; it is a business term used for forgiving a debt but more importantly it is the term used by Paul almost 100 times for the forgiveness that God gives us in Christ. Jesus is using a common term – the debtor could not pay and the moneylender graciously forgave their debt.

Keep in mind if the moneylender forgives the debt, he then, assumes the debt or has to absorb the debt. The cost is transferred back to him – he in essence pays the debt. So, when God forgives your debt of sin, he absorbs that debt and it is paid in full by Christ, by his death. The debt does not go away – it is accounted for and paid. So, this is a story of grace. The debt is forgiven and transferred to the forgiver.

This is like what we read Paul did with Philemon. In Paul's letter chapter 10 he deals with Onesimus who is a slave and also a believer. He left his master Philemon (fil·ay·mone) to serve Paul in prison, but apparently, he did so without his master's permission. Paul sends him back to his master and asks that Philemon not hold Onesimus' (on·ay·sim·os) leaving against him and that any cost incurred be placed upon Paul and Paul will pay the debt. Paul wrote, ¹⁸ "If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. ¹⁹ I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it..." (Philemon 10:18-19) The cost to forgive will be transferred to Paul and he will owe the debt.

Jesus tells the short story of the moneylender and two debtors and then asks Simon, “So which of them will love him more?” Simon might be wondering - this answer is easy so what does this rabbi have up his sleeve? Is he going to put a twist on this and in some way embarrass me? Simon goes ahead and responds saying, the one he forgave the most will love him the most. Jesus’ response is also simple and straightforward, “You have judged rightly.” Now Jesus brings things together and they begin to make sense.

Jesus turns to the woman for he established a principle with his story and question to Simon. What was this principle? Great love comes from great forgiveness. Simon had agreed the greater the forgiveness the greater the love. So now, Jesus turns to this woman at his feet, who has wept on, washed, dried and kissed his feet and says to Simon, “Do you see this woman?” Simon is probably thinking how could I not see her? Jesus is saying she is the example of great love. Jesus is saying, Simon take note for she is what you are not. Jesus continues, “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.” We have the same situation in the church today – we have people who are prideful of their position and their salvation and they have little grace for others. We have those who have been blessed with being raised by Christian parents and came to know Christ early in their lives and sometimes they do not appreciate the great blessing and sacrifices that have been made in order that they could be raised like this. Christ has been in their whole life and if they are not careful, they do not recognize the great price Christ paid so that they are forgiven. Then there are those who come from horrible pasts, like me, and they are

so aware that they are saved by the grace of God, by the sacrifice of Christ, that their salvation brings both tears and joy. I am not saying that someone who was raised in a Christian home, by Christian parents and came to know Christ early in life does not have a deep love for Christ, but I am saying when one has been rescued from the pit of hell it is easier to recognize the cost and in some ways it is easier to have a deep love for one knows the great price it took for their salvation. So here, Jesus is saying to Simon, here in this woman is an example of great forgiveness that has resulted in great love.

Notice what Jesus says now, “**her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much.**” This statement is in the perfect tense – meaning it did not just at this very minute happen, but there is a past. This had already happened, she had been transformed and her coming to Jesus and weeping with abandonment and embracing his feet and kissing his feet is the result of this great forgiveness that has produced this great love. We do not know for how long she had been transformed, you may not have thought about the fact she is already redeemed, but here her love is poured out because of her redemption. The townspeople may not have known it yet, but here is a changed woman, a woman who is no longer the deep sinner and woman of the town but she had become a saved sinner. Many will not want her to change, some will try to keep her from changing and the days ahead maybe were made difficult by these people. I remember when Christ saved me and I fought my old self and strived to be what Christ had given me – a new birth, a new life. I separated myself from people who did not want me to change. I did not see how drastic the change was, for I was very critical of myself and what I had been. Joyce tells me the change was indeed drastic and others warned her it could not be real for no one changes that much and that quickly. But, over time people saw that it had to be real for I sought my relationship with Christ with zeal and did not let people or the world change my course in life. This woman’s life is that

same type of transformation and she has the same zeal and neither she or I could image ever returning to what we were before Christ.

Observing all this is the pious Simon who did not honor Christ when he entered his home. He did not offer water to wash Jesus' feet nor a towel nor an embrace nor a kiss nor anoint his head. Is this the mark of your life? Do you live out the pious life of a Christian with outward signs of salvation without the inward passion for Jesus or do you live with abandonment filled with the love of Christ and give that love to others? This woman came lowly, she did not stand but knelt before her Lord and Savior, she loved with a broken heart that Jesus filled with the love and grace of God. She did not bring a little token of her appreciation but gave a costly gift. How about you, do you give of your first fruits, of your very best to Christ or hold back giving only what you feel you can spare?

This woman is a transformed life, living with abandonment and great love for her Savior. I know that the townspeople were shocked by her behavior and some did not believe the transformation. I would love to know about her life after this dinner. How she struggled to find a different way to support herself, how over time people changed how they saw this woman, how her testimony impacted others, how she dealt with those who did not want her to change and persecuted her and the testimony this also was of a truly transformed life. She was forgiven much and she loved much as a testimony of a transformed life.

The final point is what Jesus says in verse 48, **“Your sins are forgiven.”** Jesus could have said God has forgiven your sins, but he does not say this. Jesus knows not only those at the table but those around the table, in the room and at the doors and windows are listening. The people begin talking to each other again and we read in verse 49, **“Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, ‘Who is this, who even forgives sins?’”** I do not want to sound harsh,

but if they had listened to John the Baptist and now to Jesus' teachings for any length of time, they should have been able to answer this question – Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, the Messiah, it is by this authority he forgives sins. Scripture teaches that God alone can forgive sins, therefore Jesus is God. However, there is a pattern here, every meal Jesus shared with a Pharisee recorded in the scriptures ended in disbelief because of hardened hearts. Their self-righteousness blinded them, made them arrogant, they were prideful with hearts of stone and souls that were spiritually either dead or on life-support and about to spiritually go code blue.

On the other hand, this woman experiences a transformation – by God's grace she is brought to spiritual life and her reaction is joy and gratitude and these find their expression in love and affection for her Lord and Savior. Jesus knew the personalities and the motives of the people who were involved in this meal. He uses this lowly woman as a clear testimony of His power to transform lives before a self-righteous Pharisee and all his guests.

Her salvation was evident by all who were there – not by what she said, but what she did. Is this the mark of your salvation – your living out a passionate love for your Savior by serving others with love, grace and mercy? Paul wrote in his letter to the church in Ephesus, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:8-10) This is what Jesus did for this woman and for you and I and Jesus says the same thing to you that he said to this woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” This means to live in God's peace and experience God's peace as you live.

Living in God's peace is not founded by what you say, but by how you live. Jesus said then and he says to you now, "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:16) A life lived for the glory of God the Father and for the love Christ is a life of true and lasting grace, love and peace. Go and live in Christ, for Christ and by Christ. Amen!