

#272 “He Who Is Forgiven Much Loves Much”

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A fascinating account of an incident during Jesus' life and ministry is given in Luke 7:36-50. The setting and story is given in verses 36-39. One of the Pharisees asked Jesus if He could join him in his home for a meal. Jesus went in and sat at his table. It is important to note at this point that the Pharisees were religious to the max. They even added their own laws to God's Law in an attempt to be made righteous through their performance and works. They were very focused with the external, and they flaunted their apparent law-keeping before others. They had low regard for others, especially those who had broken the Law (somehow they couldn't see their own depravity). While Jesus was in this religious elitist's home, a woman entered the house. She had a reputation in the city, and it wasn't a good one. But she had heard that Jesus was there, and she wanted to be forgiven. She humbly took on the posture of a servant, stood behind him, wept, wet His feet with her tears, wiped His feet with her hair, kissed His feet, and put perfume on them. This wasn't in any way a form of deception or seduction on her part, but it was an act of utter humility, pleading with Jesus to love her and accept her. The Pharisee immediately judged both the woman and Jesus. He muttered to himself that, if Jesus really was a prophet, He would know that this woman was a terrible sinner and would reject her and not allow her to touch Him with her unconsecrated, uncleansed hands, hair, and lips. A good prophet, according to the Pharisee, would rebuke this woman, cast her away, and condemn her, highlighting how much better he was than her. But that was not Jesus' response at all, for He came to save sinners, not those who supposed themselves to be "righteous" already (Luke 5:32). Only those who are broken and humbled before the Law of God can receive the mercy of God (Galatians 3:24). Only Jesus fulfilled the Law of God (Romans 8:3-4), and only through His shed blood and imputed mercy can any person be forgiven (2 Corinthians 5:21). This woman knew that she had made a mess of her life, she knew that she had broken God's holy standards, and she knew that her only hope was to beg for grace and mercy, a free gift of pardoning from God (Romans 6:23).

At this point, Jesus, knowing both the mutterings and the inner thoughts of the Pharisee, told him a story. In verses 40-42, Jesus spoke of a particular lender who had two debtors. One of the borrowers owed his creditor 50 denarii, and the other owed him 500. Both were unable to repay, and the creditor, in an act of mercy, forgave both of their debts. Jesus' question for the Pharisee, was, "So which of them will love him more?" The Pharisee answered that he supposed it would be the one who was forgiven more. Jesus said that he had judged this correctly, but then he turned His attention toward the woman to help the Pharisee apply his own words to the present situation. When Jesus entered the Pharisee's house, the Pharisee did not assume the posture of a servant and wash Jesus' feet as Jesus would do for His own disciples (John 13:5-20). He acted as though he was better than Jesus or at least an equal. The woman, however, washed His feet with her tears and anointed them with her perfume. Her love for Jesus and her humility was evident by everything that she did and how broken she was before Jesus. The Pharisee approached Jesus as one who was able to stand in judgment over God Himself. He didn't bow before Him or plead for mercy, but he was willing to stand on His own merits and performance-

based "righteousness." The contrast between the humble sinner and the arrogant sinner who thought he was righteous couldn't be starker. The point that Jesus drove home for all who were there to see and hear is given in verse 47. He says, "For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little." Just for clarity, Jesus did not mean that she was forgiven on account of the kind deeds that she had just done. In verse 50, He says to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." She had faith that Jesus would be gracious to her if only she would repent and humble herself before her Lord and Savior, which she did. Jesus did as He always does for any truly repentant sinner- forgive completely. Hearing Jesus forgive sin caused those at the table other than the broken sinner to balk and get upset. While the lowliest of citizens was able to see Jesus for Who He really was, those who knew the Scripture better than the rest as far as head-knowledge was concerned couldn't accept Him as God Who could forgive sin. They were blinded by their own pride and positions of authority, but the sinner only cared for mercy. She found it in Jesus.

The woman's sins, which were many, were forgiven. She was forgiven much, and she loved Jesus much because He could forgive her and did forgive her. On the other hand, those who are forgiven little, as Jesus said, love little. This is really a profound concept, which is not surprising given that it came from Jesus. The Pharisees didn't acknowledge their sin or their need for forgiveness, and they looked down on others. Their love was cold and lacking (Matthew 24:12), and they couldn't even love God, Who is the definition of love (1 John 4:8). They studied about Him in the Scriptures, but they didn't know Him or understand Him. Jesus is a God Who longs to forgive sinners, and He promises to forgive those who confess their sins to Him (1 John 1:9). The woman asked, and she was forgiven. She learned to love, for she had been loved first by Jesus (1 John 4:19). Her love for Him was great because she recognized that she needed a great amount of grace from her Lord. But the Pharisees were unable to love Jesus, and they had little grace for others because they didn't see their own need for grace. Grace can't really be extended until it has first been received (Matthew 10:8).

When believers struggle with love for others, it may be that they are struggling with a Pharisaical attitude. Perhaps others aren't measuring up to their personal preferences or to the standards that they see themselves as having achieved. Perhaps they have underestimated the generosity of Christ in their own personal salvation, or perhaps they are holding on to a portion of self-sufficiency in terms of their sanctification. Whatever the cause or the symptoms, believers shouldn't have anything to do with a Pharisaical mindset. The reality is, the higher believers think of themselves, the less they will be able to love others because they will be looking down on them. If believers want to grow in graciousness and love toward others, they need to grow in their love for God, which requires a better recognition of just how much God has already forgiven them. The more God's children recognize just how badly they needed to be forgiven, the more they will love their Savior and be able to demonstrate His immeasurable mercy and grace toward others.