

Sinners meet Jesus * Luke 7:36-50

January 24, 2021 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

Today we are going to begin a sermon series that's been a long time coming. Years ago, I thought "Wouldn't it be interesting to think about all the people who met Jesus and how their lives were changed by him?" and so that's what this series is all about. "Encounters with Jesus."

We are going to look at 'Jesus encounters' with a variety of people and think about how their lives and outlooks were changed when they met with the Lord. This is going to give us all sorts of opportunities to think about how Jesus changes the way that we think about life and health and money and busy-ness and I hope it will be a neat way for us to meet with Jesus again 'for the first time' and have Him reshape the way we think about the world. So this series will take up right up to Easter and you have the whole thing laid out for you there in your schedule.

Today though we are going to begin with one of my favourite stories in the gospels, what my Bible calls "A sinful woman forgiven." So let's look at this story and ask "How does meeting Jesus change our attitude towards sin?"

Luke 7 is where you'll find the story; Luke 7, starting in verse 36.

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.

This would have been quite the coup for the Pharisee. If you're going to have a dinner party, you need interesting guests, and at this point, there was no more interesting guest in the greater Judea region than Jesus. Healer, teacher, prophet – this was one interesting guy – and Jesus agreed to come to a dinner party at the Pharisee's house.

And that's what this was – not a quiet, intimate meal between friends – this was a big old 'look at me,' everyone who's anyone's invited, 'I'll even open up the doors to let people come in and watch' kind of dinner party. And so Jesus went to the Pharisee's house and 'reclined' at table.

Now to be honest, I don't really know how 'reclining' helps you to swallow your food, but, this is the way you'd sit at fancy parties in these days – on one side, with your head at the table and your stinky old feet as far away from the table as possible. That's an important detail.

Now, the guests had just finished a lovely appetizer of onion and cucumber salad when a hush fell over the crowd. Standing at Jesus' feet was a woman that everyone in town knew was a 'sinner.' Given that this was a fancy dinner party, it was ok that she was there – but she was supposed to be sitting up against the wall, quietly watching all the 'important people' do their thing. But now here she was at the feet of the most important person at the table.

And (v. 37) she had an alabaster jar of perfume with her. The real expensive kind. Not the junk that seniors threw on 'minor niners' on the first day of high school. Really nice perfume.

And she got down beside Him, tears streaming from her face, dripping in big drops Jesus' feet. Luke doesn't tell us that Jesus had ticklish feet – but there she was – washing His feet with her tears, wiping them clean with her hair and rubbing this costly Chanel perfume into His feet.

37 When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume,

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.

Well, 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."

Luke has already told us that back in verse 37 – this was a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town – but we really have no idea what it was she was up to. Those details have been lost to history. But everybody in that room in that moment know – and they were shocked that this sinful, scarlet woman would come in a touch the Teacher. And even worse in the Pharisee's eyes, the teacher didn't even seem to care!

But then, verse 40, Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said.

[Jesus continued -] 41 "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. (Remember, a denarius is one day's pay, so they owe a lot of money, but...)

42 Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so... [What do you think this moneylender is going to do? Two people owe him money and neither can pay – what's he going to do? Jesus continues:] he canceled the debts of both.

[Now that's huge. Neither of them could pay and so he just forgave their debt. Just like that. And this is no small change, is it? Essentially, one guy's got a car loan and the other's got a mortgage, and the moneylender just lets them both go. That's a very generous act.] (Darrell Bock, *Luke Vol 1.*, BECNT, 699).

And Jesus continues – one owed a car loan, one owed a house - Now which of them will love him more?"

43 Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled." [You're right!] "You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

44 Then he turned toward 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.

45 You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet.
46 You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.

Simon has invited Jesus into his house but failed to do the things that would welcome Him into his own in this culture, but this 'sinful' woman has done what Simon failed to do, and she's done it extravagantly. Why?

Why has she burst into a stodgy dinner party and opened herself up to ridicule and humbled herself to wipe Jesus' feet with her hair?

It's because she is the mortgage holder in the parable. She's the one who's been forgiven an enormous debt and she understands just how valuable that forgiveness is.

See, I don't think that this is the first time she's heard Jesus. I think she's been in the crowds, listening to the Good News of the Kingdom and rethinking in life in light of what Jesus is saying. I think that she

has stopped thinking that sin is 'fun;' or maybe she's trapped in it and realized she doesn't have to stay there; either way, I think that she has heard Jesus' message, embraced the forgiveness that He has offered and chosen to show how grateful she is through this extravagant display.

And I think verse 47 confirms it.

47 Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven--for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."

Jesus understands that this grand gesture is her way of saying 'thank you.' 'Thank You for forgiving my sin. Thank You for washing away the stains of my life. Thank You for not treating me the way these rich, powerful men have – as a 'sinner' to be ignored, but a soul to be redeemed.' Jesus understands that this whole foot washing thing is an act of love in response to the forgiveness of sin and so He confirms it –

48 Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

49 The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

50 Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

It's not that foot washing saved her; it's that she has trusted Jesus for forgiveness and that faith has saved her. The foot washing is just an extravagant way of saying 'Thank You. You mean everything to me.'

So – how does meeting Jesus change our attitude towards sin? Well, it certainly helps us to see sin for what it is – a debt against God. Sometimes I think we think sin is no big deal, we think sin is 'fun;' but Jesus points out here that it is a debt that we carry around.

And not only, we see here the destructive power of sin – it can come to consume and define you. In those other people's eyes, the woman was nothing more than a worthless sinner and I'll bet she'd come to think of herself the same way.

But then along comes Jesus and says – Sin IS wrong but that's not 'who you are.' Turn from sin, be forgiven and let grace define you. Don't let 'who you were' hold you down; instead, be forgiven and cherish 'who you are' in Christ.

When we encounter Jesus, we need to turn from away from sin and towards Jesus. We need to confess our sin and let Him wash the dirt from our hearts the way this woman washed the grit from His feet.

Now that's what this woman learned when she encountered Jesus, but I think there's another encounter here that we need to think about. And this might actually be even more important for many of us. Because we've been, many of us, that sinful woman, haven't we? We've recognized the sin in our own lives and humbled ourselves to the point that we can admit it and we've come to Jesus to confess our sin and experience His forgiveness. We are 'the sinful person forgiven' as my Bible heading would say.

But the more I read this story this week, the more I thought it should really be called 'the self-righteous Pharisee challenged.' Because as much as this story is about being forgiven, it's also about what we do with that forgiveness.

I'm sure that Simon (the Pharisee/the host) had had just as many opportunities as the woman to hear Jesus speak; probably even more. And yet what has he done with the offer of forgiveness Jesus' extends? Nothing! He doesn't even take Jesus' jacket to hang it up and move His sandals into the closet so the dog doesn't eat them when He comes to his house. Simon just wants a good story out of Jesus and nothing more.

And yet he's just as much a sinner as the woman is. I mean, sure, her sin is much more flashy and public – it's like a mortgage worth of sin – but according to the parable, he's still got a car loan's worth of it. Right? It might not be 500 denarii, but it's still 50 and that's a big debt.

And that's probably many of us. We may not have scandalous, extravagant sin debts, but we're all guilty of ignoring God. We've all put our own will before His and so we all need to be forgiven. When we humble ourselves like the woman to confess our sin, we are forgiven an enormous debt; God is incredibly generous in freely forgiving us. He IS the moneylender in the parable, willing and able to forgive enormous debts because Jesus has already paid them back on the Cross.

It just won't do then to be forgiven and then take it for granted. Verse 47 implies that the natural response to forgiveness is love, is gratitude and that when God wipes away our debt before Him, it just makes sense that we would then live as grateful, forgiven people.

And that I think is the 'big idea' for this passage of Scripture:

When we encounter Jesus, we should **confess our sin and cultivate forgiveness**. We should confess our sin and cultivate forgiveness. Depending on where you are in your faith walk, you may lean more heavily on one side or the other, but it really boils down to this. When we meet Jesus, we need to confess our sin and cultivate forgiveness.

We need to confess our sin. We need to humble ourselves to admit that we have put ourselves above God; we need to repent of that attitude. That, I think, is the hardest part of forgiveness, admitting that you're not perfect, admitting that you've told God to mind His own business. I know that it was for me. But when we do, Jesus forgives our sin and makes us new. Frees us from... When you turn to Christ, you become a new creation. No longer defined by sin but defined by the radical grace of Christ. So confess your sin...

But also, cultivate forgiveness... I wrestled with the word here – whatever the opposite of 'take for granted' is – that's what we need to do with forgiveness. When we are forgiven, we need to appreciate it, value it, live in light of it, let forgiveness shape the way we live and see other people. We need to cultivate that forgiveness and be grateful for it.

Maybe you'll want to look at it like this - when people look at you, do they see a carefree, forgiven person? Or do they see someone like the Pharisee host – always looking down their nose and judging others? Are you forgiving people the way God forgave you, or are you easily angered and quick to hold a grudge? Let the forgiveness of God shape your life.

Confess your sin and cultivate forgiveness.