

Text: Luke 7:36-50

Theme: We have been forgiven much, therefore:

We repent much

We Love much

If you have ever watched *Back to the Future*, or are somewhat familiar with cars you know what a DeLorean is. A misfit of the car world, really. The thing about the DeLorean is, you either like the car, or you don't. You either think it was the ugliest thing ever made, or you think it is a work of art. There is no in-between. There is no middle ground. Today in our reading Jesus presents us with a situation where he leaves no room for a middle ground. He presents what people who have been forgiven do, and what people who have not been forgiven do. He leaves no wiggle room, and no opportunity for exceptions. Jesus shows us that those who have been forgiven much, Not only repent much, but they also love much.

Our text begins with Jesus being invited to the home of a Pharisee named Simon. Right off the bat we can see that there is something that would be quite odd in our day. We read of something strange, an uninvited woman shows up and starts washing Jesus' feet. Notice that Simon, Jesus' host, did not present Jesus with the customary courtesies that would be afforded to a house guest. A friendly greeting, water to wash his feet, ointments that signify Jesus is an honored guest. All of these were absent from Jesus' entering of Simon' home. By this time into Jesus' ministry he already had run-ins with a few Pharisees. At least twice before this, when in Chapter 5 of Luke Jesus heals the paralyzed man and forgives his sins and again when in Chapter 6 his disciples were eating grain from the field on the Sabbath, the Pharisees tried to trick Jesus and trap him in his words. They threw all of their made-up laws and pious customs at Jesus with the hope of silencing him. With this in mind we can see through the façade of hospitality this Pharisee presents to Jesus. Let us not forget, the Pharisees were a religious sect within Judaism who stressed above all else perfect adherence to the Law of Moses. They believed with full conviction, God was smiling down on them because of their strict law-keeping. They thought they had been able fulfill perfect obedience to the Law. In their minds they had little to repent of, for to them they sinned little, if at all.

Now in contrast with the behavior of Simon, we see the behavior of an uninvited guest who had a scandalous reputation; a woman who hears where Jesus is, and seeks him out, and weeps at his feet. She cries for forgiveness so earnestly that she is able to wet his feet and wipe them off with her hair and pours expensive perfume on them afterwards. Simon sees all of this and is taken back and disgusted. The Holy Spirit and his knowledge of all of the thoughts and emotions of all people, shares this with us that:

“ 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.”

The Holy Spirit gives us all we need to know about what Simon thought of this woman, of Jesus and their position before God compared to his own. It is easy to point fingers at Simon and see the obvious chip on his shoulder – not extending common courtesy to Jesus, a guest whom he believed to be of lesser importance, to looking down on this woman whom he believed to be equal with a contaminant that fouls everything she touches. But the truth is that I am a Simon, In fact we all have acted the way he did. Actions and thoughts that belittle other people or fail to acknowledge them because of some sense of moral or ethical superiority betray the gospel of Christ that has been planted in our hearts. Those actions and thoughts are condemned by God and they make us worthy of his punishment. When we fail to recognize our own sin and the seriousness of it we put ourselves in a position that is to be pitied. We look at someone like the prostitute in our reading for today, or someone convicted of a crime, and think that they are not worthy of my time or my sympathy. But have we not prostituted ourselves to the idols of this

world? Money and power are some of the obvious ones, but what about always striving to be vindicated on social media, trying to make a name for ourselves with selfish ambition, or a misguided source of motivation – influence, recognition, or that the world is beholden to you- to name a few. These lead us to never be content. God's law convicts us for these things.

As God's people we know of the countless ways we have broken God's law, and we know what we deserve because of it. Eternal separation from God and from his blessings. As children of God we have but one thing left to do and that is exactly what the woman did in our reading. We lay all of our sin, and our guilt at the feet of Jesus. Every time we stray from his Word in our thoughts, words and deeds is laid before Christ. When we think of our disregard for God's Law, we repent with sincere and penitent hearts, we repent much.

How can this be? Why would God listen to us if we just went against him and violated his law? It is because of the love of Christ. All the sin and guilt we lay at Christ's feet was taken up by him on the cross and paid for. All the things we have done, even the secret things, are not held over our head and the guilt caused by them no longer has power to beat us down. Jesus in his great and unfathomable love turns to us, just as he did in our reading to the woman and says "Your sins are forgiven".

Next we hear Jesus sharing a parable.

Jesus says, "Simon, I have something to tell you."

"Tell me, teacher," he said.

"Two men owed money to a certain money lender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled."

"You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

The meaning is pretty clear, isn't it? How much have we been forgiven? We always hear that all of our sin has been forgiven by Jesus, and that all of our sin has been taken away. But how much is that? What is the debt of our sin? You know the answer. The debt we owed was an eternal one. It was more than 500 denarii, more than 5,000 denarii. It was a debt that had no number, and had no end. An eternal debt. This is the debt that has been cancelled for us by Christ. This is the debt which no longer is held above our heads. This debt was laid on Christ and he paid the full amount freely by his sacrifice.

When we realize that we did not just have a debt of a few angry words, loose thoughts, or idle hands but rather one we could not have paid off by our own effort then we see the true worth and profound truth that is the free and full grace that is ours through the Gospel of Christ.

In this new life we have in Christ what do we do? This new debt free life frees us to truly act in love and kindness. To look at our neighbor and see a soul that is earnestly desired and loved by Jesus. And even more, when we look around this room we don't just see the same faces we see every Sunday, no, we see redeemed children of God. Souls on the narrow path, following after Christ. We are able to love and cherish the gift of work. The possessions that God gives us are no longer status symbols to flaunt but things that are God's possessions he has entrusted us with. We are finally able to see everything we do and say is in loving service to Christ and his kingdom. A kingdom which we are citizens of. We have been forgiven much therefore we love much. Not from compulsion or obligation, but because we want to, it is who we are now. We can't help it but to act in loving service to others, to our friends and family, coworkers and total strangers, all that we do when we act in pure gospel motivated love is serve and proclaim Christ and his name. Be who you are in Christ.

Paul writes in his letter to the Romans "But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness." (8:10)

Christ does dwell and live in us, and yes, we will die, but we will live eternally with Christ in heaven because of the righteousness Christ won for us on the cross. This is who we are, alive with Christ, we are freed from the eternal penalty of our sin, and instead are compelled by Christ who dwells in us to love and serve those around us. This love that we are able to show is boundless and has no limit because we have been forgiven from our boundless and limitless sin. We love much because we have been forgiven much.

Again, Jesus presented to us in his parable two men who have been forgiven a debt. Simon the Pharisee in our account today did not realize his sin. He thought he had nothing serious to repent of. In his mind his debt to God was small and not anything to worry about. Because of this he saw no need for Jesus and his Gospel. He loved little because he thought his debt and sin was small. He shows as much with his lack of hospitality towards Jesus and his attitude toward the woman at Jesus' feet. In his disgust he insults her in his mind "She is a sinner."

The woman on the other hand saw the gravity of her debt and depth of her sin and in her repentance received the forgiveness of her debt. She was forgiven much therefore she loved much. Her actions show a woman deeply penitent and remorseful of her sin. She asks for forgiveness and receives it.

Some of you may not know what a DeLorean is but we all know who left this dinner at Simon the Pharisee's house justified and right before God. When we see the extent of what our sin means for us before God, we see we have much to repent of. When we approach God and ask him for forgiveness he forgives us our sin on account of Christ. Christ has paid in full our debt. Because of this Christ now dwells in us and we are compelled to act in loving service. When we look around we don't just see flesh and bone, but we see souls on the heaven-ward path. We have been forgiven much, therefore we repent much and we love much. AMEN

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