



## Which of them will love him more?

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### Luke 7:36-50 ESV

<sup>36</sup> One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. <sup>37</sup> 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, <sup>38</sup> and 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 and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. <sup>39</sup> Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said 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." <sup>40</sup> And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher." <sup>41</sup> "A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. <sup>42</sup> When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" <sup>43</sup> Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." <sup>44</sup> Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? 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. <sup>45</sup> You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. <sup>46</sup> You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. <sup>47</sup> Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven-- for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." <sup>48</sup> And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." <sup>49</sup> Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" <sup>50</sup> And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

**Luke invites us to witness that Jesus is at dinner** with a Pharisee after the divine service in the synagogue. The host is a man who takes morality and godliness seriously, yes, very seriously. But an unexpected and uninvited guest appears. And she changes a lot that day. She helps us to understand the connection between forgiveness and love and where good works originate. After all, Jesus says that Simon must look at this woman: "Do you see this woman?" Yes, he did... but he compared himself to her in the wrong way: he knew what she was like, and therefore he interpreted what she did completely wrong. Therefore he needed help. And we need Jesus to help us also.

**A woman who is a sinner in the town** - and that probably means she is a prostitute - she enters to the house of Simon. She is crying. And then she does what Simon as a host had failed to do for the invited guest, for Jesus. Simon didn't give Jesus no water for his feet, but she wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. Simon gave Jesus no kiss, but from the time Jesus came in she had not ceased to kiss his feet. Simon did not anoint Jesus' head with oil, but she had anointed his feet with the finest and costly oil.

**But what does that have to do with the case?** Isn't it about living properly? Isn't it about following God's commandments in everyday life? Can you fix it all with tears, kisses and perfume? Simon concluded, "If that man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman it is that touches him, that it is one who lives in sin." He therefore thinks that Jesus cannot be the prophet that many think he is. Otherwise he would have known what kind of woman she were and what she is like. But a little later Jesus says: "Your sins are forgiven! Go in peace!" Yes! Jesus actually knew about her sinful life. But he also sent GRACE and FORGIVENESS into and through her soul, so that it spread throughout her body and life: Peace!

**The issue now is:** Isn't it too cheap and too easy to forgive a person who hasn't changed his lifestyle? Too risky? And therefore Wrong? Yes, if Jesus has come to explain the Law to us and make us better at keeping the law, becoming more perfect and becoming more righteous through what we do, then his might seem to be bad and wrong. Because there is not a single instruction in what he does and says to her. He does not even say: "Do not live in sin anymore!" It might seem more appropriate that Jesus pointed to the Pharisee and said to the woman: *Behold that righteous man! Live like he does! He attended the synagogue service, he has nothing to do with prostitutes in town, he lives a blameless life. Behave and do like Simon! And come again when you have changed your life, then I will forgive you your debt.*

**But instead, Jesus does 3 things:**

**1) Jesus puts the Pharisee and the woman in the same category.** They have the same problem, namely debt. Simon, I have something to tell you: <sup>41</sup> "A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. <sup>42</sup> When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of

*them will love him more?"* Both have debtors. This is how Simon and the woman look alike. And that's how all human beings are in the same category. We all have debts, debts to other people. And debt to God. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God! (Romans 3). It may be easier to see other people's debts. But that doesn't make our debt any less! On the contrary.

**2) And none of them can pay.** *"They could not pay".* Neither can we. All your selfish thoughts and words and actions that have hurt and are still hurting your family put you in debt. And what do we have to pay with? Can you atone and pay for what happened yesterday – 5 months ago – 11 years ago – and what is happening again tomorrow? - Is it perhaps payment that we go to church? Is that your payment? No. Nor do we begin the service by telling God that we have come to pay. Instead, we pray together with the choirleader: *"Lord, I have come to hear what you want to say to me, God. Help me to learn to grieve over my sins - and to find help in life and in death!"* Yes, we come to church to do something that we are otherwise so bad at doing, namely to realize our guilt and confess it instead of defending and excusing ourselves. We come to church to get help there. And we go on in peace! Even though we may think we have lived a quiet and fairly good life death comes to us all eventually – as our payment (Rom 6).

**3) The third point is that both debtors in the parable were forgiven their entire debt!** Jesus is Savior for both Simon and the sinner in the city. And she knows it! She knows Jesus as her Savior. But Simon, the Pharisee, does not know Jesus as his savior. He imagines that Jesus is a prophet who must teach people the Law, so that they may become perfect - and thus achieve eternal life. He does not understand that Jesus has come to pay the entire debt. He does not recognize that God is like the moneylender who will forgive him all the debt!

**Paul says it so strongly in Sunday's epistle text in Romans 10: that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.** Christ was the end of all requirements and all commandments for this woman. They stood in her way. She was unrighteous and couldn't change it. There was no way! She might be able to change something in the days to come, but what about her past? Her guilt followed her, even when she stopped living as a prostitute. And those who are not prostitutes also sin against the 6th commandment with lust of all kinds. And what about evil thoughts and all the rest?

**But has Jesus come to teach us to live according to the law, so that we can be saved by our works?** Paul says: *NO!* Christ is the end of the law! Provocative. But true! Christ is truly the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. Anyone who believes has received a completely different righteousness from God: the righteousness of faith. The woman got it! *"Your sins are forgiven you. Go in peace!"* There are no requirements here. None. Only the gift of forgiveness. And how do you get that faith: By hearing Christ's word, the word of Christ (Romans 10:17). Hear him, hear the words of forgiveness that everything is paid. There is nothing more for you to do in order to become righteous before God. You are righteous before God only because of Jesus. You will not be more righteous tomorrow, by what you do, but have it all in Jesus!

**What then about the Christian life and good works?** Is it not dangerous to say that we are righteous in Christ, and that *Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.* No, it is the truth of salvation! And it is the only thing that can produce fruit in our lives, as it happened in the woman's life. Jesus says: *"Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven-- for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little."* Love is not produced by demanding love. Love comes from the free forgiveness in Christ. Your life with God, your obedience and your service to other people has a single source: that you have been greatly forgiven. Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay our debt and thereby forgive us. He bought us with His own blood! (Acts 20:28). You do not belong to yourselves, for you were bought with a price! Therefore honor God with your body! (1 Cor 6,19-20).

**Such is grace!** Such is Christ. He alone can save you. Therefore, it is good to consider the question: *Now which of them will love him more? Amen.*