

Text: Luke 7:31-50

Title: The Hard-Headed Generation and the Forgiven Sinner

Truth: Repentant hearts are forgiven and then show their love.

Date/Location: February 4, 2024 at FBC

Introduction

Luke presents the sad story of implacable Israel next to the moving account of a woman saved from her sins.

I. An Unrepentant Generation Rejects God, 7:31-35

- A. 31 The Lord is making a generalization about the men of that generation. Though women participate in this sinful generation, I will stick with the interpretation that this refers to the males, the leaders, the ones who are supposed to be leading the assembly of Israel and guiding it in righteousness. Instead, they were playing another role. It is easy for men to go the gender-neutral route and spread around the blame to “the people of this generation” but the fact of the matter is that the men are responsible to lead, and God will hold them accountable for how they led their families and country.
- B. 32 Jesus likens them to children. Pause there. Children. He is calling them childish, not as trash talk, not to be mean, but because that is what they are like. Foolishness is part of childhood immaturity, and the grown men of that generation were exhibiting that very child-like characteristic. It was not endearing or cute; it was blameworthy and ugly.

These men are like a group or two groups of children who are sitting in the marketplace and calling out amongst themselves to their playmates and saying no matter what we do, you are not going along with us. We did something fun, and you did not respond accordingly. We pretended to mourn, and you did not weep with us. You are no fun! The point of the likeness is that the children hearing the call were simply not responsive, no matter what the offering was. If it was fun, they did not accept it. If it was sober, they did not accept it. They were implacable, never satisfied, always critical.

- C. 33 Similarly to the one group of children, John the Baptist came with a message of mourning and repentance. He was austere, not indulging in nice food or wine. They attributed his message and lifestyle to a demon.
- D. 34 Jesus came with a lighter, more cheerful, less austere approach. He ate and drank with sinners, sharing a level of fellowship with them. The men of that generation had a reply for that too—he was a glutton and winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. Later, they also attributed His works to the Devil (Luke 11:15) just like they did for John. That makes for an easy excuse to not believe what the messenger is saying because you do not agree with it, so you just tar and feather it with the label that it is demonic.
- E. 35 Jesus summarizes with this phrase: “wisdom is justified by her children.” The word “children” connects verbally back to the illustration of the children in the marketplace. Those hearing the call of their friends were acting foolishly. If the men of this generation had been wise, they would show it by listening carefully to what Jesus said. The aphorism is that you know wisdom by its fruits. You know a good tree by its good fruit. You know wisdom by its “children,” meaning its results, its fruit, what it produces. In the men of this generation, there was obvious foolishness, but not wisdom.

Thinking back a little farther to 7:29, did you remember that the tax collectors justified God? We might say they were like the children of wisdom justifying the wisdom of God. The Pharisees were not children of wisdom and were not acknowledging that God the source of all wisdom was righteous.

- F. Application on listening to the Christian message: one minister may be more like John; another more like Jesus. Most audience-members have a preference. And a pastor who is too dour or too lighthearted can incline their delivery a bit in the other direction and that will be a help to their effectiveness. But on the listening side, if you will not listen to anyone, if you are implacable no matter what the message is or how it is delivered, you need to examine yourself seriously. No pastor is perfect or will say things perfectly or even emphasize things that you think should be

emphasized. The point of the section is that you have people who simply will not be pleased with a messenger of truth, will not listen to anything, and are hard-hearted. Do not be like that!

The fact is that Jesus and John delivered the same message. John's emphasis was, of course, preparatory for the coming of Jesus. But they were both teaching about the need for repentance to enter God's kingdom. One pastor is like an Isaiah, preaching to a hard-headed crowd that needs to hear a sober message of repentance. Another pastor is more on the lighter side of things, like the apostle John. You do not be that person who is like these Pharisees and lawyers of Jesus's generation— Intractable, implacable, intransigent, unrepentant, hard-headed, and hard-hearted.

- G. Application on the wisdom issue. You can look at someone's life outcome and tell if they are exercising wisdom or not. There is good reason to believe that if someone has their life together and is living in a prudent way that they have wisdom. If the fruits do not look wise, there is a very simple reason for that: the root is not wise.

II. A Repentant Woman Anoints Jesus, 7:36-50

- A. 36 A Pharisee named Simon invited Jesus for a meal, and Jesus went. Luke does not tell us Simon's motivation specifically, but he does not seem to be favorable to Jesus like Nicodemus or Joseph from Arimathea. He may even have the malicious motive of finding fault with Jesus about something.
- B. 37 "Behold" indicates a surprise, something unexpected. In fact, this event was a shocker. People watched intently, not knowing what to say or how to respond.

We should note that this incident sounds like the one recorded in Matthew 26:6-13. But that event happened just before the crucifixion; this one in Luke 7:36-50 much earlier. That event was at Bethany; this one in Galilee. That anointing was done by Mary (John 12:1-8); this one by an unnamed prostitute. That event included pouring the spikenard oil over Jesus's head in a pre-burial anointing (Mark 14:3-5); this one was focused on anointing his feet.

C. 37 A “woman who was a sinner” is a euphemistic way of saying she was a prostitute. In English we have similar euphemisms: woman of the night, call girl, and many others.

The indirectness of terms is interesting from a Christian perspective, I think, because it indicates something that is going on in the conscience of the people who use the terms. Some of course are trying to be nice and not say the “naughty words.” But everyone is using indirect language because they know at heart that something is not right about that lifestyle. It is not wholesome or godly. It is common—sometimes voluntarily and sometimes compelled—but it has nothing to do with righteousness.

D. The woman came to where Jesus was. She may have had to sneak in through a crowd to get in because the Pharisee would not have invited her (see his later attitude toward such people). Part of the shock of it was that she was at—no, *in*—a Pharisee’s house.

E. Along with her, she brought a flask of fragrant oil. It was made of alabaster. Alabaster is a type of marble, making the container itself valuable. And the beautiful-smelling anointing oil inside of it was also expensive, though we are not told how expensive it was (unlike Mark 14:5).

F. 38 The woman initially stood at Jesus’s feet but soon knelt to reach his feet. Imagine the guests reclining at a low table for the meal, not sitting at a table like we do today, and with their feet stretched in a general direction out or away from the table.

G. She was weeping. What does this mean? She knew enough about who Jesus was and what He represented that she knew she had been living under a severe frown from God because of her sin. Yet she knew that Jesus offered abundant pardon and forgiveness. Her demeanor here is one of repentant faith. I take it that she was a newly saved woman when she walked into that house, or else she was only moments away from that transformation (see v. 50).

Her tears were flowing freely because she was in the presence of complete holiness, and she recognized her life had not been that way.

- H. By the way, you are prone to think she is in a particularly bad class of sinners, and that you are better than that. You need to humbly recognize that there is only one such class--all have sinned. We *all* either are in *or* have recently been extricated from sin. I pray every one of us has come to a time when we wept over our sin in the sight of God. She was able to do so when Jesus was physically present nearby.
- I. Her **tears** became moisture for cleansing the feet of Jesus. Her **hair** substituted for a cloth to wipe His feet dry. She **kissed** His feet in her expression of worship and then anointed them with **oil**, rubbing the oil on his feet and ankles. This was her expression of humble and thorough worship of the Lord. She was willing to clean his feet--with her own hair--demonstrating that she understood His exalted worth. She loved Jesus because she understood by experience His forgiveness.
- J. 39 When Simon the Pharisee observed all this going on, he thought within himself--negatively--that Jesus should have known about this woman and concluded that He must not really be a prophet. What he did not realize was that Jesus *did* know all about her. What Simon also did not realize was that he himself was the one who was misunderstanding God's heart toward sinners. Also, Simon did not realize that Jesus also knew what was going on in Simon's mind! Simon rejected sinners; he saw himself as above them; he did not have pity on someone both culpable for sin and victimized by sin. He could not stand the idea of this woman touching him. But only in his mind was she more unclean than he was. The truth was that he was also in desperate need of forgiveness. "Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin" (Romans 3:9). All the world is guilty before God.
- K. 40-47 is a parable where Jesus makes an analogy between the present situation and two people in debt. One owed ten times as much as the other, but the creditor forgave them both. His forgiveness was free and immediate. They owed nothing more. To Jesus's rhetorical question about who loved the creditor more, it makes sense that the person who was forgiven much more would love more. The vast difference in the sum owed makes this seem

certain, even though we could imagine a situation of someone forgiven a large debt being unthankful, whereas someone forgiven a much smaller debt is eternally grateful.

- L. 43 Simon understood the story, but he did not yet understand the point of the story. I wonder if his “I suppose...” indicates a bit of impatience with the storytelling.
- M. Jesus replied with a rapid-fire comparison showing Simon that he was not so good as he thought. He was in fact rude, whereas the woman was loving (v. 44-46).
1. Simon had not humbly offered even water for Jesus to wash his feet. There was something not right there—not just with his etiquette, but with where his brain was. He had invited Jesus but not cared for his guest in a culturally appropriate way. The woman was doing better than Simon, and she was “a sinner.” She offered not only water, but her own tears and hair. She was sacrificial in her love for the Lord; Simon does not seem to have had any love for Him.
 2. Simon had not greeted Jesus with a kiss, which was a sign of distance in a culture that would use the cheek-kiss as a common greeting. The woman repeatedly kissed the Lord’s feet. This was not an inappropriate activity. It was a humble activity.
 3. Simon did not anoint Jesus’s head, but the woman anointed His feet.
- N. 47 Jesus frankly states that she had many sins in her life. The parable showed free and gracious forgiveness for a person in such a state, with the result that the forgiven person loved much. The parable does *not* say the more indebted person loved the creditor a lot and so *earned* forgiveness. The context of the parable controls the meaning here, so that we cannot conclude love as a work earned the woman her salvation. Rather, she was freely forgiven—and recognized that before she entered the Pharisee’s house. *Then* she expressed her love, gratitude, and worship for the Lord. She loved a lot because her many sins were forgiven, not the other way around.

- O. 47 By contrast, someone who is forgiven little loves little. And it appears in Simon's case that he loved not at all because his sins were not forgiven at all. Such a one does not appreciate the incalculable value of forgiveness whereas someone who was in the depths of the ocean, whether the ocean of financial debt or the ocean of sin, would understand it perfectly.
- P. 48 Jesus then reiterates to the woman that her sins are forgiven. We know that Jesus can say this because He has power on earth to forgive sins (Luke 5:24). Her love response showed that she was forgiven. If there is no such response, then we do well to seriously question whether there was ever forgiveness. If you look at yourself and see that shortfall of love, ask yourself: "Wait a minute. Jesus did *that* for me? How can I *not* love Him with all my heart?"
- Q. 49 As before (Luke 5:21) those around the table began to think that this was very strange. Either Jesus is quite a person because He can forgive sins; or Jesus must be a terrible person if he thinks that he can forgive sin. Who gave him the right to do that?? Granted, this was a unique situation, but it is true because He was soon to die for her sins.
- R. 50 The narrative ends with the Lord reassuring the woman that she was OK. He recognized her faith; God had saved her. God has connected faith in Him and salvation so integrally that we can legitimately say that faith saves. There is more to it than that because *Jesus* saves in an even more basic sense. And *God* saves. And *grace* saves. But despite all the layers that make salvation "function," faith is a real instrument that brings salvation into someone's life. It is not faith *per se*, but the object of faith that brings salvation.

Conclusion

When she came to Jesus, she was in a *state*. She was grieved by her sin. She was repentant. She was troubled. Now, she had assurance directly from the Master that that she was saved. Her sins were cleansed. She could go in peace. It is safe to assume that she understood "and sin no more."

Put yourself in that woman's shoes. Your conduct has not demonstrated love for God, but rather love for yourself and your pleasures. Do you desire to be cleansed and to know God? May God's Spirit work on your heart to that end.

And if your faith has saved you, is there evidence of that in sacrificial love for Jesus Christ? Real sacrifice? What we call today sacrifice is often trivial. To give a few dollars, or skip some entertainment to serve the Lord—that is a sacrifice? Not at all. Jesus gave ALL for you. That was a sacrifice. How about you for him?

I cannot help but notice the juxtaposition of the two passages. The first is about an evil generation of people who will not listen to God's messengers. Right next to it concerns the woman who had cultivated at first a life of sin but then realized her lifestyle was deeply wrong. It was an abuse of herself, and it was dishonoring to her creator. The leadership and many in Israel could not bear the thought of admitting that Jesus was right; she on the other hand could not bear the thought of thinking she was right. She repented with tears and remorse, contriteness, and gratitude. The others refused to repent at all. This is how you can tell the difference between a child of God and a child of the world, flesh, and devil.

To conclude, here is the right order: contrite awareness of your sin before Christ; then He will forgive you; then you can love Him rightly.

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