



Luke 7:36-50  
The Path of Jesus' Life  
Scandalous Grace

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Today we're continuing our series in Luke following along the path of Jesus' life. And in this morning's passage we see two people who were on their own paths of life, and they intersected together with the path of Jesus' life at this dinner party.

Now, if you're familiar with the relationship between Jesus and the Pharisees, it might surprise you to read in verse 36 that Jesus was at the home of a Pharisee. We're not surprised that Jesus would go to Simon's house. Jesus was willing to meet with anyone, and that's still true today. The surprise here is that Simon would have Jesus over, because there was a fair amount of animosity from the Pharisees toward Jesus.

**The Pharisees were all about expansive rules, tight regulations, and small religious boxes. Jesus is about reducing the rules, loosening the regulations, and expanding the religious boxes.** Not obliterating them, but re-establishing them as God originally intended, and making more room for grace and forgiveness and freedom. As a result, there's a fair amount of conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees. So why would Simon do this?

Perhaps it was a genuine interest in Jesus that led him to invite Jesus to dinner with the other guests. But his total omission of common courtesies of the day shows that he really didn't honor Jesus as a guest in his home. If he had invited Jesus over as a genuine act of interest and respect, he would have offered water to cleanse his feet, oil to anoint his head, and a kiss on the cheek as a sign of peace. None of that happened, so clearly he doesn't really respect Jesus or genuinely welcome him in. Most likely, Simon had invited Jesus over as a kind of celebrity, as a cultural curiosity, perhaps with some curiosity to see what Jesus was really all about...but not as a revered guest.

**But there's another person who makes her way into the gathering who approaches Jesus with a totally different attitude.** This woman remains unnamed, but she's described as "a sinner." Some have suggested she's Mary Magdalene – but Luke introduces her by name later on, and she doesn't not

seem to be the same as this woman. Some have suggested she's Mary of Bethany and this is the same event that John 12 tells of – but while there are some similarities, the differences in the two events are too great for this to be one and the same. Regardless, she's a broken person, who sees her wounds and her scars and she feels the pain of her sin. We're given a clue about her and what the source of her brokenness is when it's noted that her hair was unbound. Upright and morally proper women of the day kept their hair bound up.

This causes us to wonder how a person like her got into a party hosted by a Pharisee. Was the Pharisee a client of hers? Perhaps...but most likely it has to do with the home construction of the day. Gatherings at people's homes were often semi-public events, especially at the homes of people who were pretty well off – which was generally the case of Pharisees like Simon. Homes of wealthier people oftentimes had courtyards around which the home would be built, and the courtyard was most often open on one side to the street...or would be shared by other homes. **And so when there was a party at a home, the courtyard would be utilized, making the gathering open to the public and the neighbors, and you could have a whole assortment of people there.**

It's like the story about a very proper lady who began planning a week's camping vacation for her and her Baptist Church group. She wrote to a campground for reservations. She wanted to make sure that the campground was fully equipped and modern, but couldn't bring herself to write the word "toilet" in her letter. So, she decided on the old-fashioned term "Bathroom Commode." But she still wasn't comfortable with that. Finally she decided on the abbreviation "B.C." and wrote, "Does your campground have its own "B.C.?" When the campground manager received the letter, he couldn't figure out what she meant by "B.C." He showed it to several of the campers, one of whom suggested that since there was a letterhead on the paper that referred to a Baptist Church, the lady was obviously referring to a Baptist Church.

So he sent this reply. Dear Madam: The B.C. is located nine miles from the campground in a beautiful grove of trees. I admit it is quite a distance if you are in the habit of going regularly. No doubt you will be pleased to know that

it will seat 350 people at one time, and it is open on Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday of each week. Some folks like to take their lunch and make a day of it. The acoustics are very good, so everyone can hear even the quietest passages. The people there are always friendly and welcoming; in fact, my daughter met her husband there when they were seated next to each other.

Unfortunately, my wife is ill and has not been able to attend regularly. It's been a good six months since she last went. It pains her very much not to be able to go more often. As we grow older, it seems to be more of an effort, especially in cold weather. Perhaps I could accompany you the first time you go, sit with you, and introduce you to all the other folks who will be there.<sup>i</sup> Like that B.C. situation, there could very well have been a wide variety of people at the dinner party – including some who weren't even invited – simply because of their home construction and culture.

And so she comes and welcomes Jesus with all the social protocols Simon left out. Now we also wonder how a person could have access to someone's feet at a meal, because for us, our feet would be under the table, and for someone to be under the table washing our feet...well, that would be very distracting to the meal. But that's not how they sat **(Picture here - <https://castyournet.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/jewishmenreclining.jpg>)**.



The guests would be reclined at the table, leaning on their side, leaving a hand free to reach for the food and drink, and with their feet hanging behind them off the edge of what would essentially be a backless couch. This left the feet exposed. That's why the text tells us that she stood behind him. And from there, she gives Jesus the welcome and honor that Simon didn't. She washes his feet, not with water but with her own tears. She anoints him with oil, not on his head, but on his feet. And she continually kisses him – not on the cheek as would be custom, but on his feet. **Her posture of remaining at his feet shows humility, and even worship.**

Simon, however, can't believe Jesus is letting her do this. It's scandalous! Doesn't he know who she is and what her reputation is around town? A "real" prophet would! Well, Jesus reads *his* thoughts, and poses a question to

him about who would have greater love for being forgiven a debt – the one who was forgiven a small amount, or the one who was forgiven a large amount? The conversation at a gathering like this would normally have included riddles and game-like questions. Simon takes it as that kind of question, completely missing the theological point that Jesus makes with it, and the personal application to his own life.

And the point Jesus is making is that this woman recognizes her sin and her brokenness, which is large...there's a lot of grief and pain in her life because of things she's done, or maybe the way others have treated her...failed relationships perhaps...I mean we don't know 100% for sure, but we can take some educated guesses. But she has a great need for forgiveness and healing, and she clearly recognizes that through Jesus Christ forgiveness and healing and wholeness can be found. Simon, on the other hand, has not recognized either his own sin and brokenness or Jesus' ability to forgive and heal. If he had, he would have welcomed Jesus with signs of love and gratitude as this woman has.

There are a couple of things we can take away from this. **First, we see that Jesus offers forgiveness, no matter how large and visible our sin and our brokenness may be.** This is the scandalous nature of the grace of Jesus Christ. There is a broken relationship between us and our holy Creator...it's a debt that we cannot repay ourselves. But God has repaid it himself through Jesus Christ. And through faith and trust in Jesus, that brings us back into relationship with our Creator, and serves as a model and a motivator for extending forgiveness to others in our lives as well. And it doesn't matter how large or visible our sin and our brokenness may be. Clearly, this woman had a public reputation. Her sin was known by many. But that doesn't stop Jesus from ministering to her, extending her forgiveness as she came to him in a step of faith. Maybe you've experienced public shame and disgrace the way this woman did because of her sins. Jesus isn't afraid of associating himself with you and extending forgiveness as he did to her.

**Second, we see two possible reactions we can have to this forgiveness that Jesus offers.** Simon and many of the other people at the party embody one response. It's a response that says, "I don't have a need to be forgiven" or if

there is some acknowledgement of the need, it's a response of, "Who is Jesus that he would be the one to offer forgiveness?" It's a response of pride, of superiority, of self-assuredness. This might even be said by people who consider themselves to be spiritual – just like Simon was a spiritual guy – and yet it's a response that rejects Jesus. And it doesn't lead to true reconciliation with God. We see this illustrated in the life of the great poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

In her growing up years, Elizabeth Barrett had a poor relationship with her father. In fact, when she and Robert Browning were married, their wedding was held in secret because of her father's disapproval. After the wedding the Brownings sailed for Italy, where they lived for the rest of their lives. But even though her father had disowned her, Elizabeth never gave up on the relationship with him. Almost weekly she wrote him letters. Not once did he reply. After several years, she received a large box in the mail. Inside, Elizabeth found all of her letters; not one had been opened! Had her father only read a few of them, their relationship might have been restored.<sup>ii</sup> Her father was unwilling to engage in conversation that would lead to forgiveness. And sometimes we are, too. We don't recognize our need for forgiveness, the way Simon didn't see his need. So that's one response.

The other response, however, is the woman's response. **Before Jesus even offers her words of forgiveness she came to Jesus in faith that he could forgive her and heal her.** There is much passion in her response. She is deeply, deeply sorry for the life that she has led, the choices she's made, the sins that she has committed, the pain she has caused and more. You can imagine the tears flowing from her eyes, her mascara is running...and literally she does this at the feet of Jesus. The tears flow so freely that she's able to use them to wash his feet. This is the action and emotion of a woman who is seriously broken and ashamed of the sin in her life. **It's almost as if for the first time in her life she faces up to the reality of who she is.** And as a result the dam bursts open as she grieves and mourns and expresses how broken she is because of what she's done in her life. There's not an ounce of pride, superiority, or self-assurance in her actions. It's a stark contrast to Simon, who sat in judgment, unable to acknowledge his own need for repentance, forgiveness, and healing.

In this woman, we see what it means to be broken by our sin. And it's in this state of brokenness where we recognize that we have really, really messed up. **Are you and I broken by our sin, and will we allow that to bring us to the feet of Jesus?** Some of us can look at our lives right now and say, "That woman's life isn't too far off from mine right now." Or maybe there's something from your life from long ago that still haunts you. My guess is that some of us here have been so broken by our sin that we've shed tears over it. I know I have. There have been times in my life where I've been so broken by my behavior and the way I've hurt others that I have wept out of sorrow and grief. It's a painful place to go to. Other times, I've been more like Simon. And the temptation is to be like Simon and pretend that we have no need for a savior in our lives, and stuff away those feelings of grief and remorse and pretend they'll just go away and everything will be ok. That may feel safe and comfortable: But it doesn't lead us to the true hope and healing that Jesus offers.

Conversely, when we come to that deep place of recognizing our brokenness because of our sin and because of the sins of others that impact us, we can come to the feet of Jesus just like this woman did, and receive the forgiveness and healing that he offers. That's the Good News that Jesus offers to you and to me: that he welcomes us in his presence and he extends his grace. Like the woman here, our sins may be scandalous. But Jesus' forgiveness, love and grace is equal to the task. And today, here in this moment, much like Simon and this woman 2,000 years ago, your path has crossed with the path of Jesus. By His Spirit He is here and we have encountered him. Rather than practically ignoring him and missing out on his forgiveness as Simon did, let's come to him in faith as this woman did. Let's come, broken by our sin, seeking his forgiveness, ready to be completely restored and healed by his scandalous grace. Let's Pray...Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> I have no idea where I got this – it's been in my files for a long time, otherwise I'd give credit where it's due.

<sup>ii</sup> Daily Walk, May 30<sup>th</sup>, 1992, as shared on sermonillustrations.com