

The Deep, deep love of Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, by your Holy Spirit, may you empower me this morning to speak nothing but gospel truth. May it please you to open our spiritual eyes and ears to hear and see the goodness of Jesus.

Amen. Now, so far in Luke's gospel, we've been hearing all about the kind of Messiah Jesus is. We've heard about the kind of people on his team and what kind of lives they are to live. And while frankly they may not look glamorous now, they certainly will look glamorous in the future kingdom of God. We've seen signs of what this kingdom is like.

The blind receive sight, the lame walk, the leper cleansed, the good news proclaim to the poor. Just last week, we heard how being on team Jesus means being greater than John the Baptist, of whom Jesus himself said, among those born of women, there is no one greater.

A Messiah like Jesus, so incredible, who grants us such amazing privileges. Friends, who could resist? Surely he is someone worth loving, right?

[1 : 1 2] So, why don't we love Jesus? Okay, wait, maybe that's too far. Let me try again. Why don't we love Jesus more?

Jeremy, what are you talking about? I love Jesus plenty. That's why I came to church this morning. Okay, okay, hear me out. When you first accepted Christ, you experienced a vibrant faith.

You can't stop thinking about Jesus. You can't stop talking about Jesus. Your days are filled with Bible reading and prayer. You listened to the sermons. You sang the songs.

Maybe you joined a home fellowship group. But over the next few months, over the next few years, church turns from spiritual respite to spiritual routine.

Slowly, serving feels a little more like slavery. Your family and friends hear the gospel from you again, but this time they just go, hey, yeah, maybe cool it with the Jesus stuff for a bit.

[2 : 1 9] You know, that's all well and good for you, but personally, I just don't have time for religion. And when you look around and you see that no one else is as excited about Jesus anymore, you do cool off with the Jesus stuff.

Bible reading becomes something you check off your to-do list. Your prayers are the same stale list of items if, well, you even pray at all. And when you struggle with the same cycles of sin, you tiptoe around God, feeling his eyes strain on your back.

And you come home on Sunday afternoon wondering if Jesus is just shaking his head at you, saying, my, my, what a disappointment. And you ask yourself, what happened to my love for Jesus?

Why are we so desperate to rekindle our first love for Jesus? Why is it so hard to love Jesus more and more than when we first accepted him?

On the contrary, why is it so easy to feel like our relationship with Jesus is just becoming more stale? Just old news.

[3 : 3 2] What would it take to love Jesus more? Is it more Bible studies? More church activities? More prayer? And when you force these things, they just feel more bland and more lifeless.

Friends, if that's you, in today's passage, Luke wants to tell you a love story. Here, Jesus interacts with two people who could not be more different, a Pharisee named Simon and a sinful woman. Now, let's take a look again at Luke chapter 7, verse 36 to 50, and let's experience this love story together. It all starts with a bold act.

Now, Luke sets the scene and brings us into an intimate yet public space, a dinner. Now, we've already had a feast earlier in Luke, hosted by Levi, the tax collector.

This time, however, the host is Simon, a Pharisee. How peculiar. You see, so far in Luke, we know that the Pharisees, the Jewish religious leaders of the day, were plotting against Jesus.

[4 : 47] They certainly were not his friend, because Jesus partied with sinners. They didn't like that. They accused him of being unlawful and breaking their own made-up Sabbath laws.

And by the end of chapter 6, they're plotting to kill Jesus just for healing a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. Now, Simon's intentions for inviting Jesus to this dinner are not clearly stated. Nevertheless, Jesus is happy to attend. Now, keep that in mind. This dinner was not like our private meals in our homes. Note the word reclined in verse 36.

Now, this tells us that this event was ceremonious, more akin to a banquet than a simple meal. You see, to recline is to rest on your left elbow, with your head facing the other guests, as well as the scrumptious food in front of you, and with your feet extended out behind you, leaving your right hand free to eat.

And I will not be demonstrating that position today. Now, this position of dining was customary at formal occasions. You see, as a Pharisee, to put yourself in such a position was risky.

[6 : 06] The dining table was the most intimate setting in the ancient Jewish world. So, you would be putting yourself at risk of encountering the ritually unclean, whether it's unclean food or unclean individuals, hint hint, and thereby endanger your ritual purity and your social sanctity.

Why? Well, because, again, these were not strictly private events. It was common to allow the public access to such meals in honor of a major teaching figure, such as Jesus.

This is evidenced by the other guest, whom you will see in verse 49, and it is, of course, most evident by the arrival of our second special guest.

In verse 37, a woman who is described as having lived a sinful life walks into this sterile, clean environment.

Again, we're not told much about this woman. We don't know what her sins are. We don't know her relation to Simon the Pharisee, or to Jesus, or any of the guests there.

[7 : 17] We don't even know her name. Now, some have assumed she's Mary Magdalene and label her a prostitute, but we're not told specifically that. The point is, we don't know what this woman's sin is.

All we know is that she was sinful enough to be seen as sinful by others. You see, nowadays, we would hardly think of the person sitting next to us as a sinner, unless they were involved in some sort of high-profile scandal.

This woman carried such a label on her head. And so, this sinful woman walks right into this party that's hosted by a Pharisee, and she does something absolutely scandalous.

In verses 37 to verses 38, the woman comes carrying an alabaster jar of perfume. Now, if this perfume were nard, it would have cost about 300 denarii, or a year's worth of salary.

It's expensive. And as she approaches Jesus, she's weeping. She's weeping so much that she's able to wet Jesus' feet with her tears.

[8 : 36] And as if that's not enough, she then undoes her hair, which is also culturally shocking, and then she wipes Jesus' feet with her hair. And again, as if that's not enough, she starts kissing his feet.

Now, even in today's culture, where people are much less uptight about expressing public displays of affection, such an act would, frankly, be uncomfortable and awkward to see.

And this costly jar of perfume, it becomes a costly gift poured upon the feet of Jesus. Friends, I wonder if you can picture the environment that Luke is painting for us.

Do you feel as stunned as I was reading this? Can you picture the sheer audacity of this woman as she walks into the home of a Pharisee and does this in full view of everyone?

Can you hear the gasps? Maybe the pin drop silence that follows? And make no mistake, friends, this is not some impulsive act done in the spur of the moment or maybe under the influence of some wine.

[9 : 53] Look again carefully at verse 37. You see, the woman learned that Jesus was at the house and so she went there.

And you can bet she didn't accidentally stumble upon a jar of perfume on her way there. This woman knew full well what she was doing and she knew full well where she was going.

She also knows full well her public image and who she is seeking. The question is, what would motivate someone to such a bold act?

Now before Luke answers this question, he first reveals the reaction of Simon. In verse 39, Simon thinks to himself, if Jesus were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of

woman she is, that she is a sinner.

Simon is thinking to himself, oh well, I guess Jesus isn't a prophet after all. He can't even identify a sinner. And if he were a prophet, if he knew who this woman was, well, ew, why would you let her do that to you?

[11:07] How unclean. How disgusting. You see, in Simon's eyes, he saw Jesus as a mere man. No prophet. A mere man who went around teaching about the holy kingdom of God, but he couldn't identify a sinner.

Someone who certainly would not inherit the kingdom of God. And worse still, Jesus lets her get her uncleanness all over him. Now, Jesus doesn't address the woman directly.

He does know, however, what Simon is thinking to himself. And it's Simon's reaction that causes Jesus to finally break his silence on the issue.

And as a side note, isn't it ironic that at this point, Simon is thinking to himself, oh, Jesus is not a prophet. And yet, Jesus knows exactly what he's thinking to himself.

You know, something only a real prophet could do. You see, friends, you can't hide your deepest thoughts or your secrets from Jesus. He knows you through and through.

[12:14] Now, Jesus finally breaks his silence and he speaks, revealing a deep love. In verses 40 to 43, Jesus tells Simon he has something to say.

Simon responds, well, tell me, teacher. And Jesus, in typical fashion, tells him a parable. He begins, two people owed money to a certain money lender.

Now, one owed him 500 denarii, which is about two years' worth of wages, and the other, 50, which is about two months' worth of wages. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both.

Now, which of them will love him more? Simon replies, well, I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven. And Jesus responds, you have judged correctly.

Well, it's hardly a riddle, is it? The answer might seem obvious to you too. It's only logical that the person with the bigger debt erased would be more grateful to the money lender. The money lender would have to absorb a greater debt of two years' worth of wages rather than just two months.

[13:29] Well, Jesus reveals his lesson along with the intentions of the woman. See verse 44 onward. 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. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman from the time I entered has not stopped kissing my feet.

You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven as her great love has shown.

But whoever has been forgiven little loves little. Whoever has been forgiven little loves little. Her many sins have been forgiven as her great love has shown.

Love. It's love. That's what's driving this woman's bold act. It's not insanity or some lack of dignity or self-awareness or some need to push the social envelope.

[14:39] No, friends. It's love. Plain and simple. It's a love so powerful that it drives her to this great, bold, public welcoming of Jesus.

Love really makes us do the craziest things. And don't miss the details, friend. This is a welcoming of Jesus. Now think about what Jesus is saying to Simon.

He's saying, now Simon, you may have welcomed me to your house, but did you really welcome me? Who is doing the welcoming?

Now understand that the washing of feet was customary in those days. It was culturally expected as you invited guests to your home. Simon, notably, did not provide any water for Jesus' feet.

He did not greet Jesus with a kiss. He did not put oil on Jesus' head. You see, Simon's lack of hospitality betrays his true relationship with Jesus.

[15:48] He may have invited Jesus into his home. He may have provided him with a great feast and an honorary position at his table. But the one who truly welcomed Jesus, it was the woman because she washes his feet with her tears.

She kisses them. She anoints them with perfume. That's the lesson of this parable, isn't it?

Sometimes Jesus tells us a parable and he lets us figure it out on our own, but this time Jesus spells it out for us.

In verse 47, Jesus says, Therefore I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven as her great love has shown. See, she is the woman with that 500 denarii debt and she's been forgiven. It's only natural that she would be thankful to the one who forgave her debt. And so here she is, expressing that thankfulness in this loving, bold, scandalous act.

So, that's it, right? Case closed? Sermon over? Let's all pack it up and go home. But, wait a minute. [17:14] How does this help us to love Jesus more? I mean, haven't we been hearing week after week after week that Jesus forgives our sins? So, where's the secret formula to loving Jesus more?

Well, friends, let me put it this way. If you don't come away from the story of Jesus and his forgiveness loving Jesus more, then maybe, just maybe, you're not approaching Jesus as a sinner. You're approaching Jesus as a Simon. Let me say that again. Maybe you're not approaching Jesus as a sinner. Maybe you're approaching Jesus as a Simon.

See, I think this cuts deep into what Luke is trying to show us in this passage today. Did you notice what he's doing? It may be subtle, but notice how Luke introduces our characters at the start of this narrative.

Look again at parts of verse 36 to 39. When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house.

[18:35] A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that he was eating at the Pharisee's house. When the Pharisee that had invited him saw this, he later thinks to himself, Jesus should know what kind of woman she is, a sinner.

You see, friends, the Pharisee here is named. That's quite peculiar, actually. Pharisees rarely get named in the Gospels, and here we have Simon the Pharisee.

But the question is, if Luke is such a stickler for details, and he wanted to write such an accurate account of the events that happened in Jesus' life, why won't he just say, oh well, there was a Pharisee named Simon, and then just call him Simon for the rest of the story?

Or why didn't he just say he invited him to his house? Why does he keep saying Pharisee? On the other hand, if he was such a good person at finding details, why is the woman not named? Certainly he would have known this woman's name. You see, I think what Luke is trying to do is contrast the Pharisee and the sinner.

[19:55] More specifically, he's contrasting how these two groups of people treat Jesus. Now, wait a minute, doesn't Jesus already make the comparison clear for us?

Doesn't his parable explain it all? The Pharisee is the person who owes the moneylender 50 denarii, yes? And the sinful woman is the one who owes 500. It's clear cut.

Well, is Simon's lack of hospitality then justified? You see, such a rigid reading of Jesus' parable fails to capture the truth of the matter.

The lesson, friends, is not that Simon sins less, and so justifiably somehow loves Jesus less. Nor is it that by sinning more and more and more will make you love Jesus more and more and more. That's completely contradictory. No, friends, Simon's struggle is that he approaches Jesus as a Pharisee, not as a sinner.

[21:03] again, who were the Pharisees? Now, so far in Luke, they were the people who think, well, they've got it all figured out.

They know the law. They practically invented parts of the law. And their lives consisted of strict moralistic rules and regulations. They are separatists in their eyes.

They are the only righteous people, the only holy people in all of Israel. And everyone else is just a sinner. But you see, Pharisees don't recognize their true state.

The emphasis of Jesus' parable should not be on the individual cost of the debts of these two people. But in fact, verse 42, neither of them had the money to pay the money lender back. And that's what Simon needs to recognize. That's what we need to recognize. He's stuck just as much as this sinful woman is stuck. Both of them stuck with debts that cannot be repaid.

[22:19] Let me ask you a question. Do you count your sins? Or can you count your sins? Now if you answered yeah, well, I don't think you're trying hard enough.

Here's what I mean. In alcohol and drug support groups across the world, for example, you'll get tokens or coins for staying sober. These tokens document how many months or years you've successfully avoided some sort of vice or addiction that you've been struggling with.

Now, obviously, I'm not saying that this is a bad thing. I mean, Jesus himself brings freedom from addiction. But what I am saying is that sometimes we can end up treating our journey of

sanctification a little like that, right?

We zero in on one or two sins that really trouble us and we just count, how long have we not done this? How long have we not done this sin? And we get satisfied as the number gets bigger and bigger.

But friends, don't let such counting blindsides you from the many ways that you still sin every day in thought, in speech, and in action.

[23 : 37] You see, Simon probably counted his sins. He probably knew the law so well that he could keep track of all the laws he broke. And what did this do? It only served to push him and his fellow Pharisees further down this spiral, this us versus them mentality.

Does this mentality sound familiar? Okay, okay. You know, maybe this week I did something I shouldn't have done. But I only did it once.

I mean, I know people at work, you know, they tell me that they do that same thing all the time. And they talk about it like it's nothing. Don't they have some shame?

Sure, you know, maybe I pirated that movie, but I really did try to watch it legally. It's not my fault that it's not streaming on Netflix. And at least I pay for Netflix, right?

I know people, everything they own is pirated, all of it. Hey, you know, even if I did sin twice this week, I did spend my entire weekend at church, right?

[24 : 47] I'm always, always, always working hard for God. Surely, he must accept me, right?

Friends, such a legalistic, score-keeping view will not make you holy.

Really, friends, it only serves to make you think of yourselves better than others, viewing your spiritual life as some sort of race to heaven, while failing to realize that heaven is not even in reach. No, friends, really, it's a race to hell. And no matter how big the size of your debt, you cannot begin to pay it off.

You see, they say hindsight is 20-20, and by the help of the Holy Spirit, I pray that all of us, at the many times we look back on our Christian lives, will realize just how sinful we truly are.

I mean, I myself personally look back and cringe at the many sinful things I did that I thought were okay, or maybe even the good things that I did, but out of a sinful heart.

[26 : 03] So we need to reframe that question, friends. It's not do you count your sins, it's do you realize your sins are uncountable? Because Jesus knows that they are practically uncountable.

He sees deep within us. He knows Simon's thoughts, and you can bet he knows Simon's heart better than Simon would have known it himself.

You see how Jesus knocks Simon down a few pegs. He equalizes the Pharisee and the sinner. Look again at verse 44, and notice what Jesus does.

He turned toward the woman, and said to Simon. It's the woman he's looking at, and yet it is to Simon he speaks.

It's the woman who is openly known to be a sinner, and yet Simon, the Pharisee, is the one who receives the rebuke.

[27 : 07] Jesus is triangulating a new relationship between the woman and Simon. In Jesus' eyes, both of them are sinners.

In Jesus' eyes, both of them have unpayable debts. And in Jesus' eyes, both of them are welcome. So let me ask again, who truly does the welcoming in this story? Friends, the first person in this story who truly welcomes others is Jesus.

That's the deeper love in this story. It's Jesus' MO to welcome the sinner. Remember, he came for the sick, not the healthy.

He's been dining with them, teaching them, and even forgiving them, something that only God can do. Jesus here again shows his authority to forgive sins.

[28 : 16] In verses 48 to 50, Jesus declares that the woman's sins are forgiven. Now the other guests begin to ask themselves, who is this who even forgives sins?

But Jesus simply adds, your faith has saved you, go in peace. Your faith has saved you, go in peace.

Friends, we need to hear again and again and again that our sins are a rebellion against God, our Creator.

As the God who creates, He is the one who dictates how our lives should be. And so when we turn against what He tells us, that's a rebellion against our Creator.

God and that makes us enemies with God. You see, it wasn't God who turned against us, it was us who turned against God.

[29 : 18] And that's why God has to be the one to forgive our sins because we are in the wrong and He is the party who has been wronged by us.

And understand, friends, that God has no reason to forgive us. You see, God doesn't need us to be God. He is not like the gods of fiction or TV who weaken to the point of death when they are not worshipped.

God is not needy in that way. He does not need to be praised and worshipped to be God. If all the universe were to ignore Him, He would still be God.

And yet, yet, this God who is fully sufficient in Himself sent His Son to take on the humility of flesh just so He could heal the sick, just so He could welcome the outcast, just so He could reverse the curse of sin, just so He could be rejected and kill dying an innocent death for the people who put Him on that cross.

Why, friends? Why would God do this? Well, the only answer is love.

[30 : 49] Again, the deepest love. Only the deepest, most gracious love would do this. Only the deepest, most gracious love would push Jesus to experience hell so that we may be spared from it ourselves.

That is what Jesus offers with His welcome. Not just a washing of your feet, no, a washing of your hearts and a washing of your souls, a pardon from our sins by His suffering on the cross.

Please read this clearly, friends. Jesus did not forgive the woman because of her act of love. It was not her actions that led to her forgiveness.

It was her forgiveness that led to her actions. In verse 50, Jesus tells her, your faith has saved you, go in peace.

Not, your act of love has saved you, go in peace. Her earlier expression of love, it's evidence of her saving faith.

[32 : 03] Now, somehow, this woman knew who Jesus was. Somehow, she must have known that Jesus forgives and welcomes sinners. And so, her act of love, she already has faith that Jesus will accept her.

So, I'm sorry, friends, but there is no secret formula. The motivation, the drive, the power to love Jesus more, it's the gospel.

It's the gospel you've heard preached from this pulpit week after week after week. It's understanding that you're stuck with a debt that you cannot even begin to pay off.

It's understanding that Jesus paid for your debt with his life on the cross. And it's understanding that he accepts you and that he welcomes you with his deep, deep love.

And now, friends, you can truly understand why Jesus uses the language of depths to explain his point. Now, as you continue to live, and I'm sure many of you are aware, you will continue to sin.

[33 : 17] Your flesh will war against your spirit, and you will fall short daily. You see, your debt is not static. It's not capped at 50 or 500.

Every single day, you are incurring more and more of this unpayable debt of sin. This parable, it tells us that we love in proportion to the forgiveness that we receive.

And Jesus' forgiveness covers all your sins. Is the math starting to add up? You see, if you approach the Christian life as a Simon, you will see yourself as superior to other Christians, and you'll walk around with a head held high, feeling sufficient of your own righteousness, but failing to realize that you can't do anything about your sin.

You'll fail to see your need for Jesus. Either you think you've got no reason to welcome Christ, or that you're good enough to handle your sins. You see, if your understanding of sin is that, well, I've sinned only a little, and therefore Jesus has forgiven me only a little, you will love Jesus only a little. Such a welcome of Jesus is no welcome at all. Sure, I'll allow you into my home, but I'm not touching your feet. And yes, friends, this warning is about Christians as well, not just non-Christians.

[34 : 44] as a believer, at every waking moment, you are in danger of forgetting the gospel and relying on your own works for salvation.

It happened to the Galatians, and it can happen to you too. So, friends, how are you treating your sin? Are you blindsided to the reality of your condition?

And more than that, how are you treating your fellow sinners? sinners? How would you feel if someone involved in public scandal walked through those very doors and sat down next to you in the service?

Would you fidget in your seats, turn up your nose at them, ignore them completely, thinking, surely Jesus doesn't have time for the likes of you? Oh, how terrible.

Doesn't this person have any shame? This is a place for good people. If you look at the people in church, you see their struggles with sin, public or not, and they only make you feel uncomfortable or they make you feel superior?

[35 : 52] Friends, that's a warning sign. Don't be a Simon. But, if you approach Jesus as a sinner, someone who recognizes their own sin, someone who owns up to it, who only realizes more and more and more how big your sin is, if you realize that you're on the dead end, that you're in grave danger of hell, that God has no reason to show you grace because of the magnitude of your sin, brothers and sisters, only then can you begin to realize just how much bigger the magnitude of Jesus' love is.

A love so big, it welcomes you to the foot of the cross and beckons, cast your sins, your guilt, your shame, everything evil you have ever done, cast it upon my shoulders.

Your debt is paid. Yes, all of it is paid. As Tim Keller famously said, we are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever did believe.

Yet, at the very same time, we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope. Now, if you hear this clearly, if this gospel does not just stay at the back of your mind, but it burrows under your skin and you let it get deep into your heart, friends, how can you not love Jesus more?

Brothers and sisters, Luke today shows us that you can approach Jesus just as you are, words and all. Now, we may not know how Simon ultimately responded to Jesus, but what about you?

[37 : 43] Have you realized your great depth of sin? When was the last time you reflected on your state in sobering honesty? Will you surrender your shame, your guilt, to Jesus, the only one who can deal with your unpayable depth of sin?

Don't hide with your sin, friends. Jesus welcomes, Jesus loves, Jesus forgives. You see, the mark of the exemplary Christian is not that they sin less than others.

The mark of the exemplary Christian is that they recognize just how sinful they are, and instead of turning to rigid legalism and rule keeping, they embrace the loving arms of Jesus.

They approach him, weeping from the burden of their sins, the guilt, the shame, knowing that Jesus is the only person who can unburden them. And only then, friends, only then, will you be free to lovingly and boldly live for Jesus.

The love of Jesus motivates our own, and our love for Jesus then manifests in bold action. when you first accepted Christ, you experienced a vibrant faith.

[39 : 07] But as you recognize more and more and more your sins and Jesus' unrelenting love for sinners like us, it only grows more vibrant. That love swallows you whole.

You can't help but love Jesus back. And because you love Jesus, church turns from spiritual respite to spiritual nourishment. Because you love Jesus, you learn to serve sacrificially just like Jesus did. Because you love Jesus, you still tell your friends and family the gospel even when they are sick and tired of hearing it. Because you love Jesus, even when it seems like no one else is excited anymore, you never lose your wonder at the love of Jesus.

You see it in your Bible. You pray every day and thank him for it. Because you love Jesus, when you struggle with the same cycles of sin, you run back to his arms.

See it as another opportunity to bask in his love. And you can go home on Sunday afternoon, marvelling why Jesus would look upon your helpless state and say, your sins are forgiven.

[40 : 18] Go in peace. And you remind yourself, my, my, what a wonderful Messiah I love. Church, the deep, deep love of Jesus births a deep, deep love for Jesus.

The deep, deep love of Jesus births a deep, deep love for Jesus. let's pray.

I'll give us all a moment to reflect on our lives, to ponder upon the depths of our sin. Yet, friends, deeper still is the gracious love of God.

Ponder upon that grace and then we'll pray together. our dear loving Father, grant us spiritual eyes that recognize our sinful state.

Thank you for sending Jesus Christ, who took the pain, suffering, and death of humanity out of love for us, his enemies. and thank you for paying for our debts by his loving, atoning blood.
[41 : 43] May that great love and the forgiveness it brings empower us daily to love you back more and more. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.