

A young man saw an elderly couple sitting down to lunch at McDonald's, and he noticed that they had ordered one meal, and an extra drink cup. As he watched – the gentleman carefully divided the hamburger in half, then counted out the fries, one for him, one for her, until each had half of them.

Then he poured half of the soft drink into the extra cup and set that in front of his wife. The old man then began to eat, and his wife sat watching, with her hands folded in her lap.

The young man decided to ask if they would allow him to purchase another meal for them so that they didn't have to split theirs.

The old gentleman said, "Oh no. We've been married 50 years, and everything has always been and will always be shared, 50/50."

The young man watched as the old gentleman ate his food, but the wife did not, so he asked the wife if she was going to eat, and she replied, "It's his turn with the teeth."

This morning we are still talking about sharing – thank God not like that, but more specifically – the sharing of our faith. Last week we started our sermon series on the subject of sharing our faith and our focus was on the topic of fear, and although we are people of faith, and are called to walk by faith, God knows that we are still prone to fear, hence the need for hundreds of Bible verses on that very topic. Last week I talked about the fear of rejection, and the fear of not knowing what to say, and the fear of failure – fears that tend to plague us all when it comes to sharing our faith. And even though our fears may impact us to varying degrees, we all have to come to that place where we have to honestly ask ourselves: **Do I trust God enough to take me where I am afraid to go?** That's a tough question – but we have to answer it and we have to be honest about it. **Do I trust God enough to take me where I am afraid to go?** We need to trust Him, because it's our faith in God that overwhelms our fear to – ironically – share our faith.

Often times, when churches try to promote evangelism and encourage believers to be more committed in sharing their faith, they focus on the *how* because that's where people want to go and granted the *how* is important, the skills and the techniques are important, but if we only have the *how* and we don't have the *why*, then there is no rhyme or reason for what we are doing and there is no sustaining drive behind it to where sharing our faith actually becomes an integral part of our lifestyle. Without the *why*, we won't be motivated to share.

Now let's be really honest. If we aren't motivated to share our faith, it doesn't matter if we are trained. If we aren't motivated to share our faith, it doesn't matter if we have opportunities to share. If we aren't motivated to share our faith – we likely won't share. We just won't do it. The *why* has to come before the *how*; otherwise, nothing really changes. So, this morning it's about the *why*.

I suspect we all have different *why's* – different motivations that drive us to do what we do – and the sharing of our faith is no different. For some, they share because they acknowledge we are commanded to do so – it's an act of obedience – it's what we are supposed to do – simple as that. For others, they read **John 3:16** and because God so loved the world, they will too. That's all the motivation they need. And still for others, there is the realization that people are hopelessly lost and are going to a real hell. Yes, there is a real fiery tormenting hell where there is no comfort, no rest, no hope, and no God, and people share because they are burdened over this terrible truth and don't want to see the lost go there. That's their motivation for sharing. The *why's* for sharing our faith are many, this is only a few of them, and this morning I want to consider another. So, turn with me to **Luke 7**, and we are going to look at a story you will probably recognize – it's a great story.

Let me set the stage before we begin. This story takes place at a private dinner party, and it's important to know that in those days, the line between private and public was somewhat blurred – at least by our standards. People still had private property, but it wasn't necessarily private. Houses were often built with an open courtyard in the middle, and if you were having a function like a dinner party, your invited guests would gather around the table in the center of the courtyard. Those who were not invited to the party, were still free to roam into the courtyard, hang out a bit, listen to the “important people” as they talk, and if they are were lucky, they might get some leftover food. So, this private dinner party is not necessarily private – it's not behind closed doors as we might come to expect.

Another piece of information to know is that it was customary for the host to greet his invited guests with three things – a welcome kiss of peace on the cheek, cool water was poured over the guest's dry and dusty feet to cleanse and comfort them, and to show extreme respect and courtesy to a guest like a rabbi, their head would be anointed with olive oil. These things were just good manners for a host and all of this will have some bearing in our story.

Okay, let's get into our passage in **Luke 7** beginning with **verse 36**.

³⁶ Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him, and He entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. ³⁷ And there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, ³⁸ and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume. ³⁹ Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner."

Jesus was invited to a private dinner party at Simon's house. Simon was a Pharisee – a respected religious leader in the community. Outwardly, he looked religious by trying to abide by the numerous rules and regulations in keeping with the Mosaic Law. He fasted regularly, he tithed, he prayed several times every day, and he never missed attendance at the synagogue. From all outward appearances, he seemed to be a good man, a decent man; however, as a Pharisee, he was probably hoping to find some incriminating evidence against Jesus to help build a case against Him, that's what these religious leaders were doing – and Jesus knew this, but He goes to the dinner party anyway which is likely also attended by other Pharisees as well.

So, Jesus along with the other dinner guests were reclining at the table. In that culture, the guests did not sit at the table like we do, rather they reclined at the table – a short table. They would lay on low couches, resting on their left elbow, leaving the right arm free, with their feet stretched out behind them away from the table. So, this is what they are doing, eating and talking with each other – then all of a sudden, this woman enters the open courtyard, and no, this is not Mary the sister of Martha or Mary Magdalene as some might suggest. This is another story.

We are told this woman was a sinner. Apparently, she was a notorious sinner, she had a bad reputation, and most suppose that she was a well-known prostitute in the area. She was a "low-life" and a woman like this would never be welcomed in the house of Simon the Pharisee, so it was shocking that she was there. Under normal conditions, Simon and this woman would never interact. He would not go near a woman like her for she was unclean and disgusting – and she would not go near a man like him because he was too judgmental and condemning. Yet strangely enough, here they are at the same place, at the same time, to see the same person. This woman most likely had a previous encounter with Jesus in which she learned of His great love and forgiveness for her – and she had to see Jesus once more.

We are told that she comes behind Jesus, where His feet were, and she was sobbing heavily. As the tears flowed from her eyes like rain, maybe she noticed that the tears carried off the dust from the unwashed feet of Jesus. So, she used her tears to dampen and clean His feet, and then she takes down her hair to dry them. For a woman in that culture to let down her hair in public was disgraceful – but she had no towel – this wasn't planned, but it didn't seem to matter to her. She begins to kiss His feet repeatedly, overcome with emotion for Jesus, and after that, she anointed His feet with an expensive perfume that she carried with her.

We can only guess how awkward this was, and how everyone silently watched the woman and her emotional display towards Jesus. No one said a word, but Simon thought to himself, **“If this man were a prophet, He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner.”**

Simon doubted Jesus was a real prophet because Jesus allowed this sinful woman to come to Him – to touch Him. **Didn't Jesus know who she was? Had He not heard of her nasty reputation? Didn't this “prophet” have the ability to see this woman for who she really was? Could He not see her heart?** Oh, Jesus most certainly could see, He saw it all – as we will soon find out.

It was Jesus who broke the awkward silence, and He answered the question that Simon only thought silently to himself. Let's continue with **verse 40**.

⁴⁰ And Jesus answered him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” And he replied, “Say it, Teacher.” ⁴¹ “A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. **So which of them will love him more?” ⁴³ Simon answered and said, “I suppose the one whom he forgave more.” And He said to him, “You have judged correctly.” ⁴⁴ 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. ⁴⁵ You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. ⁴⁶ You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. ⁴⁷ For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.”**

Jesus knew exactly what Simon was thinking so He told Simon a little story, and it went like this: Once there were two people who owed money to a lender. One owed the lender 50 denarii. A denarii was considered a day's wage, so we are

talking about nearly two months of wages. The other owed the lender 500 denarii, ten times more, nearly two years' worth of wages, and neither of these two had any money to pay their debt, neither one, so the lender, out of the goodness of his heart, graciously forgave the debts of both.

Simple story, but Jesus followed with an important question for Simon: ***Which person loved the lender the most?*** Simon smells a trap so he's a little cautious in his answer, but he says, *I suppose the one who had the larger debt that was forgiven*, and Jesus replied, *that's right*.

Then Jesus looked at the woman and said to Simon, ***“Do you see this woman?”*** Jesus knew that Simon most definitely saw this woman, Jesus probably noticed the look of scorn on Simon's face – he saw her, but what Jesus was asking was this: *Simon, in light of the simple story I just told you, ***do you see this woman?****

But all Simon chose see was this unclean woman, this prostitute who deserved nothing but his ridicule and rejection. That's what this religious leader, this man who represents God, chose to see – but Jesus, who is God in Simon's presence, sees something entirely different. What Jesus sees is a humbled and broken woman, and He knows her struggles, and her heartaches, her dashed hopes, and her many, many sinful failures, but Jesus also sees a woman who was deeply grateful for a forgiveness she did not deserve – pouring out her love for Him without any concern about what other people might think. That's what Jesus sees.

I have said on several occasions that we don't see like God sees – that's a given, but if we are paying any attention, it doesn't take much to see and respond to the broken, and the hurting, and the lost people around us. They are all around us and these people matter to God. He cares for them – He desires a relationship with them – and He wants His love to be made known to them.

Author and lecturer Leo Buscaglia once talked about a contest he was asked to judge. The purpose of the contest was to find a story about the most caring child. The winning story was that of a 4-year-old child whose next-door neighbor was an elderly gentleman who recently had lost his wife. Upon seeing the man cry, the little boy went into the old gentleman's yard, climbed onto his lap and just sat there. When his mother asked him what he had said to the gentleman, the little boy said, “Nothing, I just helped him cry.”

This little boy saw this man, and whether he knew it or not, he shared God's love with him. I fear that it's not that we don't see the broken and the hurting and the lost people around us, but it's that we just don't care what God cares about.

Did you notice how Jesus reacted to this woman? He doesn't turn her away when she got too close and touched Him, He doesn't ridicule her for her past, He doesn't tell her to back off because it's just too awkward and too embarrassing – instead He showed compassion, He accepted her just as she was, and received her love.

It is obvious that Simon and Jesus were not seeing the same woman, in fact, Simon was really only seeing what Simon wanted to see, so Jesus started to make a few comparisons between the two of them, which doesn't seem like a fair comparison when you think about it – a prostitute on one hand and Simon, a proud respected religious Pharisee on the other. This doesn't seem fair at all – at least by our standards, then Jesus explains that Simon didn't extend the common courtesy of greeting Him with a kiss on the cheek or providing water to wash His dry dusty feet, but this woman did everything he didn't do and then some. She washed Jesus' feet with her tears and dried them with her hair and hasn't stopped kissing His feet. Simon didn't anoint Jesus' head with olive oil, but this woman anointed His feet with expensive perfume, and then Jesus drives home His point in **verse 47**.

“For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.”

In other words, *“Simon, the sins of this woman were many, there's no need to debate that, and like in the story I just told you, this woman had a great debt to God that she could not pay. She knew it. It was just too great, but she was graciously forgiven of much – so as a response to this great forgiveness, she loves Me much.”*

“But you Simon, in your mind, you had the much smaller debt, something you think you can manage by your own self-effort, and in your self-righteousness, you don't feel the need to be forgiven and so you don't love Me.”

Simon's problem was he chose not see the woman, he could not see Jesus for who He truly was, and he refused to see himself. It was easy for Simon to say, *“She is a sinner!”* It was easy for Simon to think that Jesus was not a real prophet, but it seemed impossible for Simon to admit, *“I am a sinner too.”* Simon could not see that all are in debt to God – some owe more, some less, but no one can pay even a single penny of what we owe – so in that sense everyone has the exact same need – forgiveness of sin by God.

Simon, do you see this woman? She is a perfect example of what it looks like when someone has been forgiven much and loves much. Then Jesus said

something directly to the woman that raised a few eyebrows. In **verse 48**, Jesus said,

“Your sins have been forgiven.” ⁴⁹ **Those who were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves, “Who is this man who even forgives sins?”** ⁵⁰ **And He said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”**

Jesus told this woman, **“Your sins have been forgiven.”** This woman was forgiven because she believed, she had faith that if she came to Jesus as a repentant sinner, Jesus would not reject her but forgive her. She was absolutely right, He did not reject her, and of all who went to the dinner, only this woman – a prostitute, is said to have left forgiven.

How could Jesus say to the woman and to you and me for that matter, “Your sins have been forgiven?”

Well, the easy answer is only God can forgive sin, because sin is against God, and Jesus is God – but in the context of our passage, we find another explanation. In the story that Jesus told about the two debtors and the money lender who graciously forgave their debts, we must understand that just because their debts were forgiven – their debts were still outstanding, they were still on the books, and these debts would now have to be settled by the lender. These debts just didn't magically disappear, they were transferred to the lender to reconcile. That's how it works, and when God forgave you and me of our sin debt, a sin debt we couldn't pay – it still had to be reconciled, and that sin debt was transferred to Jesus to pay. That's why He went to the cross – to pay for it all, once and for all. That's why He could say, **“Your sins have been forgiven.”**

At the beginning of my message, I said I wanted to focus on *why* we are to share our faith. If you recall, I talked about what Jesus saw and I talked about what Simon the Pharisee saw or didn't see, but I didn't consider until a few days ago what the woman saw, and I think our answer to *why* lies with her. **What did she see?**

I think she was a woman who hated what she saw – and I don't mean Simon the Pharisee. She hated herself and hated what she had become. She likely had hopes and dreams just like any little girl, hoping to be married and have a family one day, but that's all long gone. Now, she sells her body, and in that culture, she is one of the worst of sinners, and of course, she is constantly reminded of that by religious

leaders like Simon, who reportedly represented God. From her perspective, from her line of sight, she was too far gone, too broken, too used, and too lost.

But that all changed when she saw Jesus, and she learned that God was nothing like she had been told or had expected. She saw and experienced first-hand His love and His grace and His forgiveness for her – the woman she hated – He had accepted. **How do you respond to that?** Just like she did. She was overwhelmed. Her love and gratitude for Jesus was directly related to her understanding of the depth of her sin and the gracious forgiveness she received.

I think it is fair to say that once we come to grips with the depth of our own sin, when we remember who we were and what we were without Jesus, and when we consider the great and gracious forgiveness we have received – we not only love Jesus more, but we also begin to care about what He cares about and that's making Him known to people who do not know Him – and that's *why* we are to share our faith. We share out of love and gratitude.

Last week I challenged to you make simple connections with people, and this morning I am telling you *why* – because God loves them, and He wants His love to be made known to them, and secondly, we have been graciously loved and forgiven by God.

Pastor Tom Mercer writes, “Years ago, I heard an incredible story about a guy who, while walking through an intersection in a large city, noticed a police officer directing traffic in the middle of the street. As he walked by, the man sensed the Holy Spirit prompting him to go up to the officer and tell him that God loved him. The man dismissed the impulse and kept walking. Haunted by the continued sense that he had been disobedient to the Spirit, he finally walked back to that intersection, up to the officer, and said, “Excuse me, Officer, but God just told me to tell you that He loves you.” Tears began to trickle down from under the cop’s mirrored sunglasses. Traffic stopped. With a broken voice, the officer said, “I prayed to God for the first time in a long-time last night and told Him that, if He was real, the least He could do was to send someone to tell me that He was there for me.”

Source Material:

Holman Old Testament Commentary – Max Anders
Sharing Jesus Without Freaking Out – Alvin L. Reid
Exposition Commentary – Warren Wiersbe
The Bible Knowledge Commentary – Walvoord & Zuck
Enduring Word – David Guzik