Luke Lesson 27 (2019)

**JESUS ANOINTED BY A PROSTITUTE**

(Subtitle: “Her many sins have been forgiven”)

Luke 7:36-50

Key Verse: 7: 47

“Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven – as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.”

In the previous passage, Jesus helped John the Baptist who was in prison and sent two of his disciples to ask him, “Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?” Jesus basically told John that he should not fall from his faith by encouraging him to see how God was  working mightily by saving and healing many lives just as the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament predicted. Despite John’s doubt at the lowest point of his life, Jesus still evaluated John very highly because his ministry of the baptism of repentance prepared the hearts of people for the kingdom of God (24-28). In fact, people who rejected John’s baptism of repentance, especially the Pharisees and other Jewish religious leaders, remained spiritually blind and rejected God’s purpose for them and God’s way of salvation. On the other hand, those who received John’s baptism through their repentance acknowledged that God’s way was right. And they became God’s children by accepting the grace of forgiveness of sins through Jesus the Messiah (29-30). What a contrast between these two kinds of people. And Jesus said in verse 35, “But wisdom is proved right by all her children.” (video clip#1)

Today’s event illustrates a stark contrast between the two persons; Simon the Pharisee who remained cold and critical toward Jesus and the sinful woman who washed Jesus’ feet with tears and kissed and poured perfume on them. This is a story of love between the Holy Son of God and a woman who had lived an immoral life. Before engaging in the story, we need to clarify that this event is different from other similar incidents described in the New Testament; such as Jesus’ being anointed by other women, which happened in Bethany near Jerusalem right before his death(Jn. 12:1-8; Mt. 26:6-13; Mk. 14:3-9). This event occurred not in Bethany but in one of the towns of Galilee. In fact, Luke is the only one who recorded this event in his gospel narrative, probably because it portrays Jesus the Messiah of the world and his divine and redeeming love for sinners, even for the worst kind of sinner.

Look at verse 36. “When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee’s house and reclined at the table.” The name of the Pharisee who invited Jesus in this passage was Simon (40). He was Simon the Pharisee who was different from Simon the Leper in Matthew 26:6 and Mark 14:3. In Jesus’ time, the name Simon was common in Israel, including Simon Peter and Simon the Zealot (Lk. 6:14-15), Simon from Cyrene who carried the cross of Jesus (Mk. 15:21), Simon the sorcerer from Samaria (Acts 8:9-11), Simon from Joppa, a tanner by trade (Acts 9:43) and so on. 

We don’t know for sure why this man, one of the Pharisees who were hostile toward Jesus at that time, invited Jesus to have dinner at his house. It was possible that, unlike the other Pharisees, Simon still wanted to have a chance to investigate about Jesus before having his opinion set about him. He wanted to see for himself if Jesus was a great prophet, as many people talked about (7:16). He probably wanted to collect negative information about Jesus, so as to disprove Jesus’s identity as a great prophet. Apparently, Jesus, who is all knowing, was aware of why Simon was inviting him to his house. Yet, Jesus willingly accepted his invitation, because he dearly loved Simon the Pharisee and wanted him to know the grace of forgiveness of sins. 

While Jesus, along with other dinner guests, reclined at the table, an uninvited guest interrupted the dinner. Look at verses 37-38. “A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.” The woman who surprised everyone at the dinner was not a pleasant person whom everyone wanted to see. Instead, she was the last person that everyone wanted to see; a notoriously sinful woman, apparently a town’s prostitute.

As soon as she walked into the dining hall, she noticed that Jesus was reclining at the table. So, she went straight to him and stood behind him at his feet. She didn’t say anything but only wept with many tears. Her many tears dropped and began to wet Jesus’ feet, which were covered with dirt and mud. Then, she wiped his feet with her hair, then kissed them and poured perfume on them.

Wow! Can you imagine what it was like? What she did to Jesus was probably uncomfortable and even embarrassing to the guests in Simon’s house, including Jesus himself. Just think about it: a town’s prostitute, whose sinful and unlawful life was condemned by many people, trespasses someone else’s property and does an offensive act. She could’ve been told to leave the place immediately by the dinner host. Simon could’ve called the cops to arrest her. Yet, it didn’t happen.

Look at verse 39. “When the Pharisee saw who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, ‘If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is – that she is a sinner.’”  What surprised Simon the most was Jesus’ attitude toward her and her bizarre actions. In fact, it seems that what was surprising to Simon about Jesus worked for his own purpose. He said to himself, *“Humm, if this man permits this disgusting lady to touch him and allow her to do what she was doing to him, it’s a proof that he is not a prophet.”* In his mind, Simon judged her and Jesus for their actions. He had no idea about why she did what she did.

We don’t know for sure why and how she became a prostitute. Whatever the reason might be, living as a prostitute is an unhealthy lifestyle, which is often marred with abuses, deep hurt, shame, guilt and hopelessness, often followed by STD and death. She knew that her life was nothing but a nightmare, being  hopelessly stuck in the chain of darkness. But when she heard Jesus’ message of the kingdom of God, she had come to know that there was hope for her life through the grace of forgiveness of sins. She felt that her curse had been removed. She was overjoyed and so thankful that she just could not miss the opportunity to express her deep gratitude to Jesus for the grace.

Simon the Pharisee didn’t know anything about what had happened to her through Jesus’ grace. Even though Simon didn’t utter any offensive word to him, it was obvious that he was very judgmental of her and Jesus through his facial expression. Jesus was aware of exactly what Simon was thinking. He didn’t say to him “*Simon, I know exactly what you are thinking. Don’t be judgmental.”* Instead, he wanted to share the grace of forgiveness of sins with Simon, which would be a very difficult conversation. But Jesus initiated it by saying in verse 20, “Simon, I have something to tell you.” “Tell me, teacher,” he said.

In verses 41- 43, Jesus spoke the parable of two debtors. Look at verses 41-43. “‘Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 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 replied, ‘I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.’ ‘You have judged correctly,’ Jesus said.” The meaning of this parable is quite simple. And the answer to Jesus’ question was obvious to anyone, including Simon the Pharisee: the one who had bigger debt forgiven will love the moneylender more than the one who had less debt forgiven. However, the true meaning behind the parable is the grace of forgiveness of sins. Yet, Simon had no clue at all.

In the following verses, verses 44-47, Jesus explains more clearly about the grace of forgiveness of sins. Look at verses 44-46. “Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, ‘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.” In these verses, Jesus surprises Simon by making the woman the focus of the parable, and by contrasting him with her. All the things that Simon failed to do for Jesus, such as providing water for washing feet, a  welcoming kiss, and putting oil on the head, were common courtesies of the hosts for their invited guests in those days. The fact that Simon didn’t do any of these common courtesies for Jesus reveals his lack of love for Jesus. On the other hand, what the woman did to Jesus was far beyond the common courtesy of the time, and she had made such an unusual sacrifice for Jesus out of love, respect and gratitude.

Read verse 47. “Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven – as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.” This statement can be a little confusing. Although it appears that her many sins have been forgiven because of her great love for Jesus, that’s not what Jesus meant at all. Rather, it means that the woman’s great love toward Jesus is evidence that she had experienced the grace of forgiveness of her many sins. In short, her great love for Jesus was the result of the forgiveness of her sins.

In fact, Jesus’ statement in verse 47 teaches that our love toward Jesus must be preceded by two things: **(1) a deep awareness of our sins and (2) the assurance that our sins are forgiven, no matter how big or terrible they may be**. It means that our Love for Jesus cannot be genuine and long-lasting unless it is founded on the awareness of our sins and the assurance of the forgiveness of our sins. In other words, God’s grace of forgiveness of sins should be the foundation of our faith and devotion. Some people are up and down in serving the Lord, depending on their feelings, because their faith is not rooted in the grace of Jesus. This reminds us of Colossians 2:6 and 7, which states, “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.” This also reminds us of 1 Corinthians 15:10, which states, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them – yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.”

Look at verse 48. “Then Jesus said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’” When Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven”, it does not mean that her sins were forgiven for the first time. Instead, Jesus was confirming to her what had already taken place. So, this statement could be paraphrased as “*Your sins have been forgiven and stand forgiven!*” On the other hand, Jesus had to declare that her sins were forgiven because even though she was forgiven, she was still considered as a sinful woman among the people and especially by the Pharisees. So, it was necessary for Jesus to declare in public that her sins were forgiven by God.

Look at verse 49. When Jesus declared that this woman’s sins were forgiven, the other guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgive sins?” The answer is obvious. If Jesus can forgive this notoriously immoral woman from all her many sins and if Jesus can forgive each of our many sins, who is he? He is not just a great man or a great prophet. You know it. He is God himself. This is an amazing revelation of God to us (1 Cor. 12:3).

Look at verse 50. “Jesus said to the woman, ‘Your faith has saved you; go in peace.’” By saying to her “Your faith has saved you; go in peace”, Jesus confirmed to her that it was her faith in his grace of forgiveness of sins that had resulted in her salvation. Salvation is not by our works but by faith in Jesus’ grace and in God’s work (Eph. 2:8-9).

The story in today’s passage is a story of love between the Holy Son of God and a sinful woman, a town’s prostitute. I like us to close the sermon by reading today’s key verse, verse 47, “Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven – as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.”  Jesus’ comment on the woman’s love teaches that the more we understand forgiveness, the more love we will have for him.

How can we love God as she did? We need to know the grace of forgiveness of our sins. In order to grow in his grace, the awareness of our sinfulness is necessary. Many people today seem to think that being aware of one’s sinfulness may not necessarily have a positive impact on oneself. So, they try to trivialize their sins in order to get rid of their guilty conscience. Yet, there is a great danger because when we try to get rid of our guilty conscience, we can become an ungodly person. In fact, being aware of our sinfulness is a good sign that we are not far from God’s salvation. However, it is not good enough until it is combined with the assurance of forgiveness of our sins.

As a matter of fact, the Apostle Paul was deeply aware of his sinfulness before God and have the assurance of forgiveness of his sins. As a result, he became a great lover of Jesus Christ. He said in 1 Timothy 1:15, “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst.”

The grace of Jesus is God’s mysterious way of salvation, through which we can continue to grow as a lovely and beautiful child of God. Our last question is *“Are you more like Simon the Pharisee or like the woman who anointed Jesus in today’s passage?*” How would you know it? You would know it by the degree of your love for the Lord our God. May the Lord help us grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.