

Extravagant Love

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Preacher: Rev. Hugh Ferrier

[0 : 00] Friends, would you turn with me please to the passage that we read in Luke's Gospel, Luke's Gospel in chapter 7, sorry, verse 47.

Luke 7, verse 47 we read, therefore I tell you, her sins which are many are forgiven for she loved much, but he who is forgiven little loves little.

Well friends as we prepare our minds and as we prepare our hearts for coming to the Lord's table later in the service, I want us to focus on Jesus encounter with this woman as Luke presents it to us in his Gospel and really the woman's reaction to Jesus and her feelings toward Jesus.

And for those of you who may be taking notes, we're looking at the passage under two headings. We're looking at the extravagance in verses 36 to 40 and then the explanation in verses 41 to the end.

The extravagance and then the explanation. First we have the extravagance, that's in verses 36 to 40 where Luke focuses on this woman's extravagant devotion toward Jesus, a woman's extravagant devotion toward Jesus.

[1 : 36] Verse 36, Luke records the invitation, these verses really provide us with the context for the events that follow and Luke begins by introducing us to a Pharisee. Now the Pharisees were the social and religious conservatives of Jesus day.

They taught a doctrine of salvation by separation, that is you were saved by God, you were accepted by God through what you avoided and not only through what you avoided, but through whom you avoided. They saw themselves as really being a cut above the rest.

And they looked down on those who didn't meet their own standard of righteousness. And this particular Pharisee who's called Simon has invited Jesus into his home. Perhaps he's interested in Jesus.

Perhaps he's got a growing respect for Jesus. Perhaps he wants to trap Jesus in something that he's saying or doing. Perhaps he wants the prestige of others, seeing him having this influential teacher, this influential rabbi coming into his home.

Whatever it is, he invites Jesus to dinner and Jesus enters his house and takes a place at his table. Now, I love that. Because if you look up at verse 34, you see that Jesus is the Savior who eats with tax collectors and sinners.

[2 : 57] And then jumping down to verse 36, he's also the Savior who eats with self-righteous Pharisees. Luke is making a key point. Jesus has come to seek and to save the lost. And it doesn't matter if you're a lost tax collector or a lost Pharisee.

Jesus has come to save both. And in verses 37 to 38, Luke records a sudden interruption. We're introduced in verse 37 to this nameless woman. Luke tells us that she was a woman of the city.

Now, that could mean she came from that particular area. It's more likely that this is Luke's polite way of saying that she was a woman of the streets. She's a prostitute. And Luke tells us that she was a sinner. This woman's lived an immoral life and everybody knows it. This woman's got baggage. This woman's got a background.

She's the kind of woman that other women would refuse to engage with, the kind of woman that other women would want to gossip about. She's the kind of woman that no upright, upstanding male member of the community would dare to be seen in public with. Nobody wants to go near this woman.

And now she's come into this Pharisee's home carrying an alabaster box of perfume. It's her most prized possession. She would keep this close to it at all times.

[4 : 20] If her house was to go up in flames, this would be the one thing that she would take with her. It's important to note, as we'll see in a few moments, that this woman has already had a life transforming encounter with Jesus.

We don't know where, we don't know when, but at some point she'd met with Jesus and received his forgiveness, his grace, his offer of salvation. And she's astonished that he would go after a lost sheep like herself. She is astounded that he would welcome a prodigal like herself.

She is amazed that he would leave the glories of heaven to reach out to a sinner like herself. And so she comes into this Pharisee's house and look at what she does.

She comes behind Jesus and she draws near to him and as she draws near to him, she falls apart. Luke tells us that she wept. And this word wept doesn't mean a little whimper. It's rather a word that describes a heavy shower, a heavy fall of rain.

She thinks about all her own things that she'd done, all her own things that she'd done with her body. Thinks about all her own things she'd done with her soul, how she more or less sold her soul to the devil.

[5 : 37] And she's overwhelmed that this Jesus, this rabbi from Nazareth would reach out to her, that he would receive her, that he would rescue her, that he would love her. And the tears begin to flow with shame and with gratitude that he would actually engage with her.

And as her tears fall onto Jesus' feet, she wipes them with her hair. It's an extraordinary scene. A Jewish woman's hair, you remember, was her crown, her glory.

And this woman is using her crown, her glory, her prized asset to wipe the tears from this man's feet.

But she goes further as she kisses his feet and anoints them with her perfumets. A wonderful scene. And Luke tells us that she kept weeping and she kept wiping his feet.

She kept kissing and kept anointing his feet. It's a very emotive picture. And it's at this point that Luke records the Pharisees in Dignation in verses 39 to 40.

[6 : 47] Simon begins to speak to himself and there's always a problem when you begin to speak to yourself. And Simon speaks to himself and he says, verse 39, this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is and who is touching him.

For she is a sinner. No friends, how Simon judges this woman. He's a Pharisee. And he's very good at judging people. He's very good at putting people into boxes. And the box that he has put this woman into is she is a sinner. That is how he has categorized her.

And he also knows how he judges Jesus. He thinks that he is a good Pharisee can decide whether or not Jesus is a prophet. And as far as he is concerned, a prophet would be able to sniff out the odor of a sinful woman such as this from many miles away.

And not only would he sniff out her odor, but he would refuse to engage with her. He would refuse to look at her. He would refuse to have her touch him. And so Simon is judging this woman and he is judging Jesus and he's busy speaking to himself.

And as Simon is speaking to himself, Jesus suddenly speaks to Simon. Luke tells us that Jesus answered Simon. What's he answering?

[8 : 05] Simon's inward thoughts. So Simon thought that he could judge whether Jesus was a prophet because a prophet would surely know what sort of woman Jesus is.

And Jesus says, Simon, I know what sort of woman this is. I even know what you're thinking right now about her. That is how discerning Jesus is. And you know, as a little aside, friends, he knows what we're thinking about his people today.

And he knows what we might be thinking of those who are around his table today. And Jesus says, Simon, I have something to say to you. This was a phrase that people use in the Middle East to introduce a blunt speech that the listener may not want to hear.

There's now a growing and mounting tension at this dinner party in this Pharisees home and all Simon can do is say, say a teacher, what do you have to say? What do you need to get off your chest?

Well, friends, in these verses, we really have a picture of a woman's extravagant love for Jesus. She's completely lost in love and wonder and praise. She's oblivious to all around her as she displays her affection, her devotion, her love toward Jesus.

[9 : 20] She's like the woman in the song of Solomon. Do you remember how the woman in the song of Solomon has lost her beloved and she's speaking to her friends about her beloved? And I say to her, why do you go on and on about him? What's there to write home about? Why are you saying that you're sick with love, that you're love sick?

And she replies, I'll tell you why. My beloved is radiant and ready, distinguished among 10,000. His head is the finest gold. His locks are wavy, black as a raven. His eyes are like doves set beside streams of water bathed in milk, sitting in a full pool. His cheeks are like beds of spices mounted on sweet smelling herbs.

His lips are lilies dripping liquid mur. His arms are rods of gold set with jewels. His body is polished ivory, bedecked with sapphires. His legs are alabaster columns set on bases of gold. His appearance is like leberon, choice is the cedars. His mouth is most sweet.

And I will tell you, my friends, he is all together lovely and he is more than all together lovely. He is my beloved and he is my friend. And if he is the beloved and friend of no one else, he is the beloved and the friend of mine. And that, friends, is a picture of a Christian. A Christian is one who loves Jesus.

That's that simple. You remember when Jesus reinstated Peter after his repeated failures, after his dismal denials. He didn't look for great boasts, great promises, great declarations from Peter. Instead, Jesus asked him the most simple but soul searching question that even one of the children here could have answered.

[11 : 06] He said, do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me? And that, friends, is what a Christian is. That's what a disciple is. One who loves Jesus.

I sometimes wonder if we can complicate and distort the beauty of this. That we can so easily focus and fixate on the things that we've done or that we are doing or that we hope to do for the Lord.

We can so easily focus on the books that we've read, the sermons that we've listened to, and the experiences we've had, and the theology that we've learned, and the people that we've learned it from.

But I love what David Sushay, famous for acting as Hercule Poirot on ITV, said in an interview. He was asked about his Christian faith and he said, it is a relationship.

It is a relationship with Jesus. It is not simply the embrace of a doctrine. It is the embrace of a person.

[12 : 09] I can't make it any more simple in that, friend. A Christian is one who loves the Lord. And if you love the Lord, friend, then your place is at his table with his people, remembering his death.

Doesn't matter what the devil may whisper in your ear. It doesn't matter what the world may say about you. It doesn't even matter what other Christians may know about you.

And they may know a lot or they may think that they know a lot. It doesn't even matter what your own guilt-ridden conscience may tell you. Today the Lord is coming to you in his word. He is coming to every person in this room. Those who are at the table, those who are behind the table.

And he is saying, do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me? That's the woman's extravagance. All she wants to do is show her love.

This brings us then to the explanation in verses 41 to 50, where Luke focuses on the reason for this woman's extravagant devotion toward Jesus.

[13 : 22] Verses 41 to 43, Jesus delivers a parable. Now as we said last night, Jesus parables weren't nice little stories designed to entertain the crowds.

Instead they were earthly stories that contained a heavenly meaning. They were like an irritant we said. They get under your skin. They make you uncomfortable. They get you off guard. There's something that you keep on coming back to.

And this parable is quite straightforward. Jesus speaks about two men who owed a money lender a certain amount of money. One of the men owed 500 denarii. That's 20 months wages. The other owed 50 denarii. That's two months wages.

And the money lender canceled both debts. Now this doesn't mean he just swept it under the carpet that he pretended they never owed the money in the first place. Instead he himself paid off the debt. And he wrote on their account, paid in full. Tethylesti, it is finished.

And after delivering the parable, Jesus has a discussion with Simon about it. Jesus asks a key question. It's not a trick question, but it's a leading question. Jesus asks now which of these two men will love the money lender more? And Simon knows where Jesus is going as he asks the question.

[14 : 42] Simon knows the money lender represents God. And he knows the debt represents sin. And he knows that the two debtors represent the various levels of sinner.

And he replies the one I suppose for whom he canceled the larger debt. And Jesus says to this fantasy, don't you love the irony of this? Jesus says to this fantasy, who love judging others, you've judged correctly. You've made so many wrong judgments Simon, but here's one right judgment you've actually made.

And in verses 44 to 47, Jesus records, Luke records the way in which Jesus explained and applied the principles of the parable. In verses 44 to 46, Jesus compares and contrasts the actions of this woman and this fantasy. And he begins by saying, do you see this woman?

Now, fantasies didn't look at women. To look at a woman would be regarded as adultery. But Simon, who is so good at seeing if this woman is a sinner or not, had noticed this woman coming into his house.

And Jesus now says to her, Simon, I know you've looked at this woman, but I want you to really look at her because you, Simon, far as see that you are have so much to learn from her.

[16 : 11] And Jesus then highlights what Simon had failed to do. He provided no water for Jesus feet. He hadn't greeted Jesus with a kiss, hadn't poured soothing oil on Jesus head. You know, there are some people who can make you feel like they're honored to have you in their home.

The man behind me is quite good at that. He makes you feel like it's an honor for him to have you in his home. But there are others who can make you feel like you're honored to be in their home. There's a difference.

And that is how Simon had treated Jesus. He made it seem as if Jesus was honored to actually be in his home. Phil Reichen writes in his commentary, how often do we perhaps treat Jesus in the same way?

We've invited him into our hearts, but there is still more hospitality to give. The honor of our worship, the greeting of our prayer, and yet we can treat the Lord with shocking content.

And then Jesus outlines what this woman whom Simon had judged had done. She'd wet his feet with her tears and wipe them with her hair. She'd repeatedly kissed his feet and anointed them with her perfume. And it brings us into Jesus' punchline in verse 47, where we read, Therefore I tell you her sins which are many are forgiven, for she loved much, but he who is forgiven little loves little.

[17 : 48] Now it's important that we know that Jesus isn't saying that this woman's loving actions were the cause of her forgiveness. Instead, Jesus is saying that her loving actions were the consequence of her forgiveness.

She's like that debtor whose debt had been so greatly canceled and now she loves the one who's canceled her debt. David Prince calls this verse a bombshell where he says, this woman loved lavishly because she had been forgiven greatly.

When you're caught up with the magnitude of grace, then cultural respectability is one of the first things that goes by the wayside. You're willing to be seen as a fool for Christ's sake and you don't care.

And just imagine, practically speaking friends, imagine if we as a congregation were so caught up with the magnitude of Christ's grace, if we were so caught up with who he is and what he has done for us that we just didn't care what anyone else thought of us.

And we didn't care how we were seen in church. All we wanted to do was magnify his name. And finally we come to Jesus' word of assurance in verses 48 down to 50.

[19 : 07] Jesus now addresses this woman and he tells her that her sins have been forgiven. Her debts have been canceled. Now remember this woman has already been forgiven and her loving actions have shown her awareness of that forgiveness.

But sometimes a person, particularly when they've been criticized and when their past has been dragged up, sometimes they really need to remember that they've actually been forgiven.

And maybe that's true of someone in this room. Maybe you knew the wonderful forgiveness of the Lord Jesus and yet one of the Lord's own people dragged up your past and you felt rubbish afterward.

And here's Jesus and he's saying to this woman, don't forget this, your sins have been forgiven and they haven't simply been forgiven.

They will literally always be forgiven. They will remain forgiven no matter how much that Pharisees dragging them up.

[20 : 13] The rock band you too have a song window in the skies where they sing the rule has been disproved, the stone it has been moved, the grave is now aggroove, all debts are removed. Oh can't you see what love has done?

That's the gospel. It's all about what love has done. God's love in Christ. Now, friends, that's why we come together each Lord's day to be reminded of this great gospel truth that our debts have been canceled.

Our sins have been forgiven. That is why we come together around the Lord's table to be reminded of the broken body and shed blood that enabled our debts to be canceled.

Our sins to be forgiven. My friend, if you are lacking that assurance today, then I would urge you not to absent yourself from the place where you will hear the Lord saying, your sins are forgiven. I really worry when I meet some of the Lord's people and they're maybe going through a bit of a backslidden period or maybe they're just lacking an assurance and they think that the great remedy for them is that they will absent themselves from the means of grace and they think, well, I just won't go to this particular communion. I'll just not be at the Lord's table.

My friend, that is a place where you ought to be. You ought to be in the place where you will hear the message, your sins are forgiven. You ought to be in the place where you will be feasting on the elements that declare your sins are forgiven.

[21 : 44] Don't absent yourself from that place, friend. And as the crowd marvel at what Jesus is actually saying, he gives the woman a final word, your faith has saved you, go in peace.

She trusted in Jesus. She'd experienced his forgiveness and now she can go away under the smile of God. She can leave this Pharisee's home not with the temporary approval and applause of men, but rather she can leave knowing the blessing, the shalom, the wholeness, the acceptance and the approval of God himself. She can leave securing the knowledge that she's been reconciled to God.

She can leave sure and certain that her relationship with God has been dramatically changed. Her debts have indeed been cancelled. Her sins have been removed as far as east as from the west. She is a new creation.

Well friends, as we hear Jesus explaining the reason for this woman's devotion, we're really been given a picture of two very different responses to Jesus. We have this woman so full of devotion, so full of joy, so full of gladness, so full of love.

And we have this Pharisee so distant and detached, so cold and so critical. And the only explanation for this woman's great love is found in the fact that she knew what it was to have her many sins being completely forgiven.

[23 : 23] All her actions, her weeping, her wiping, her kissing, her anointing, all that stems from the fact that she had encountered the loving heart and compassion of Jesus.

Charles Spurgeon writes, he who has stood before his God, convicted and condemned, with the rope around his neck, is the man who will weep for joy when he is pardoned.

Is that true of you friend? Have you known what it is to almost have as it were the rope around your neck? Convicted, condemned, then pardoned?

Can you say with a hymn writer, before the throne of God above, I have a strong and perfect plea, a great high priest whose name is love, whoever lives and pleads for me, my name is grave and on his hands, my name is hidden on his heart.

I know that while in heaven he stands, no tongue can bid me thanks depart, and when Satan tends me to despair and tells me of the guilt with him, upward I look and see him there, who made an end of all my sin.

[24 : 34] Because the sinless Saviour died, my sinful soul is counted free, for God the just is satisfied to look on him and pardon me.

You know, sometimes we can do our utmost to try and forget that we have a sin problem. We do our best to create and maintain a good reputation and standard of living. We come into church and we wear our suits, maybe we wear our hats, maybe we carry our Bibles and it looks great and people ask us the question, how are you doing?

And we give the standard answer, I'm fine. Fine. But friends, it is only when we come to that place where we say, I'm not fine. I have no other argument. I have no other plea.

I know that I'm a mess and I know that I deserve to be eternally condemned, but I know this. I know that Jesus is enough. I know that he's the one who's removed my sin. I know that he's the one who's cancelled my debt.

It is then and only then, isn't it, friends, that we truly see his preciousness, his worth, his value. We will never see the beauty of the robes of his own spotless righteousness until we realize what it is to wear the discarded rags of our own sinfulness.

[26 : 00] Sam Albury was recently asked why he loves Jesus. This is what he said. I love Jesus because Jesus loved me. He's revealed his goodness. He has revealed his kindness.

He embodies all that we long for and wish that we were but so often aren't. I love him because of his compassion and truthfulness. I love him because of his willingness to do what he did for people like me, that he wouldn't just point out my mess but would actually throw himself into it and bear in himself all the consequences of my sin.

And so make me whole and right in him. That is someone I can build my life on. I love Jesus because Jesus loves me. I love Jesus because he first loved me and threw himself into my sinful situation and bore in himself the consequences of my sin to make me whole in him.

So, at your testimony today, friend, don't think that the man here has got his life sorted. Don't think that I've got my life sorted. We're a mess. We have absolutely nothing but we have Jesus who is everything.

And any wholeness that we might have is in him. Well, friend, I want to close with a warm invitation. I want you to remind you that the Jesus who loved this sinful woman, the Jesus who loves Sam Albury, the Jesus who loves Myrtle, Campbell and Hugh Faire, the Jesus who forgives sin and cancels the debt, is the Jesus who invites you to come to his table.

[27 : 58] Come to the table that participates in the blessings of the new covenant. Come to the table that remembers his death that secured our forgiveness.

Come to the table that declares that we love him because he loved us first from all eternity where he entered into that covenant of redemption with his own Father and said, I am willing to pay their debts. Charge every last penny to my account.

That's my warm invitation, friend. That is his warm invitation to you. And the question is, do you really want to hold back from showing your love for such a savior?

Do you really want to hold back from showing your love for such a friend? That's all we're doing. We're coming to his table and saying collectively and corporately, I love the Lord.

Well, friends, it's a great privilege for us today to come to the Lord's table and to eat the bread and to drink this wine because we do so joyfully acknowledging that our sins have been forgiven and that our debts have been cancelled.

[29 : 32] The body of Christ has been broken for us. The blood of Christ has been shed for us. He has done it all. He has done it all.

And today, if you're able to look at Jesus as he's presented in the gospel and you're saying, I love him. He is my beloved. He is my friend. Then you are warmly invited to come to his table and eat this bread and drink this wine. It's a joy and a privilege having you in this church family today.

But maybe today you're a Christian. You're looking at Jesus as he's presented in the gospel and you are likewise able to say, I love him. He is my beloved and he is my friend. But as yet for whatever reason, you feel unable to go to his table and take communion.

I want to assure you, friend, that that doesn't make you any less, any worse a Christian, any less loved than those who are at his table because it is not eating bread and it is not drinking wine.

It gets us through the gates of heaven that brings us into the presence of God that secures our adoption into the family of God. It is Jesus and only Jesus.

[30 : 57] The forgiveness of our sins, the cancellation of our debts isn't based on what we eat or drink. It is based on Christ and Christ alone. And again, we rejoice in having you here. But maybe today, friend, you're not yet a Christian. You see Jesus as he's presented in the gospel, but you have never been able to say, I love him.

He is my beloved and he is my friend. And I want to encourage you, friend, by saying that you are loved by the intermoderator of this congregation. He has a heart for the people here and you are loved by the curesion of this congregation.

And their great hope, their great prayer, their great longing, their great burden is that you, friend, will respond to this Jesus and that you will come to him.

And you will know the rich enjoyment of life with him, where you will know with absolute certainty and joy that your sins have been forgiven. Your debts have been removed. They have been cancelled.

And that one day, friend, you will be at this table singing with the Lord's people, I love the Lord.

[32 : 18] Well, as we consider these matters, and before we take these elements on to share something, which I hope will be an encouragement to you all. When fencing the table on one particular Sunday, Professor John Murray of Westminster Seminary said, Disciples are jealous for the honour of Jesus. When the Lord's glorious maligned, His truth has sailed, His cause trampled underfoot, do you burn with holy indignation?

Then you are the friends of the Saviour and you are welcome to come to the table that He has prepared for you in the wilderness, in the presence of His and your enemies.

And there may be so many reasons you could give for not coming to His table today. And maybe even before you left the house, you're wondering, should I come to His table this Lord's day?

But my friend, if you are jealous for His honour, if you are passionate when it comes to His glory, then this table is where you ought to be.

This table isn't simply where you ought to be. This is the table that you are called and commanded to be. As Professor Murray says, it is an obedience that you come to the Lord's table, not because you are worthy, nor because you can boast of your faithfulness, but because you dare not deny Him the Lord of your hope and your destiny. You dare not deny Him.