

# The Love of God

## *Personal Breakthroughs:*

Luke 7:36-50

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“I’m just waiting to die,” Tony told me. Tony was injured swimming when he was young. As a result, he suffered difficulty retaining facts and figures. He felt stupid compared to other kids. He came out of our schools believing he was a failure. He saw his life through the lens of loss and inability. At one point he medicated himself with pornography. He became addicted. He married once. However, his heart was so full of degrading thoughts and feelings that it spilled out in angry acts of spousal abuse. After his divorce, those thoughts and feelings dogged his dating. He believed conventional thinking that he can’t change. He felt that he was hopelessly flawed and better off alone. As we sipped coffee, he told me, “I love Jesus and I like to share his love, but I’m just waiting for him to take me to heaven to escape all this crap.”

How many believers in Christ echo Tony’s sentiment? They’re tired. They’re tired of unending struggle with sin, discouragement, and death. They’re tired of all the problems and look wistfully at those who enjoy life. This series and message is for all the Tonys who find, like former Chrysler executive Lee Iacocca says, that the light at the end of the tunnel... is from a locomotive about to run them over.

I think that must have been the attitude of the woman in Luke 7. She not only made bad choices; she also was known for them. She went to a dinner where the host, Simon a Pharisee, disapproved of her intensely. He had invited Jesus to his home for dinner, and this woman

showed up at his house too. The woman stood behind Jesus rather than confront him face to face. She wept and wet his feet with tears. She used her hair to dry his feet, and then pressed her lips against them in repeated kisses. She then poured perfume on his feet. Do you think this woman valued Jesus? Do you think this woman loved Jesus? Why did she do this to Jesus?

Simon the Pharisee was on a completely different thought-track. He was thinking if Jesus was truly a prophet, he would have understood the woman's moral condition.

Jesus interrupted Simon's thoughts. He told a story about two people with debt. One owed 500 denarii, which is 500 days' wages or about two years of income. In northwest Rochester two years of household income is about \$140,000. The other person owed 50 denarii or about 10 weeks of wages or about \$14,000. Both persons, the one owing \$140,000 and the one owing \$14,000, had paid nothing; and their creditor cancelled both their debts. Jesus asked Simon which debtor would love the creditor more. Simon correctly thought that the debtor who was forgiven more. Then Jesus turned to 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. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven — for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.*** (Luke 7:44-47, NIV)

Simon did not love Jesus. He respected him. He kindly invited him to dinner, but he didn't love him. Simon offered Jesus courtesy, but not affection. Simon did not pay attention to Jesus' dusty feet (having spent my camp week in sandals, I can tell you that feet get dusty). The woman noticed and did not bring water. She wet his feet with her own tears. Simon did not greet Jesus with the kiss of friendship. This woman dared not to raise her lips to his cheek, but unceasingly she kissed his feet in adoration. Simon did not honor Jesus with an act of anointing,

but the woman poured expensive perfume on his feet in an act of lavish love. Who loved Jesus? Simon or the sinful woman? Why did she love him? She loved him because she, not Simon, recognized God's personal favor for her in him! She, not Simon, received personal forgiveness of sins from him. She, not Simon, received the love of God in Jesus; consequently, she, not Simon the religious Pharisee, had a personal breakthrough. The woman's faith saved her. It was she, not Simon, who left with forgiveness and peace.

Think: do you behave more like Simon or this woman? Are you filled more with questions or love, doubts or gratitude? Have you dumbed-down the gospel so that it is more a truce with God than an adventurous companionship? Do you think you must live with illness and worry? Do you just want to get to heaven? Do you really believe that the kingdom of heaven is near you? Jesus announced that it is near, that this is the time of God's favor. This is the time when broken hearts are mended, broken lives restored, and broken bodies renewed. This is the time when God forgives sins and fills hearts with love.

I wished you could have seen what I saw a week ago at camp. I saw youth weeping and praying for one another into the late of hours of night. I saw an older man nearly paralyzed by back pain, released of it as I prayed for him. Two days later, he left camp without that pain. Little, antsy, preschool children turn sober and quiet as hands were laid on them. One told an accompanying adult, "Jesus touched me on my shoulder." Another said, "Jesus touched my heart." I saw children, at the end of camp, lay hands on their counselors in prayer and thankfulness; and I heard a 10-year-old say that Jesus told him to read a passage of Scripture for the counselors. The Scripture was amazingly appropriate, and tears filled my eyes... and my nose ran. This is the time of God's favor. This is the time when our sins are forgiven. There is no need to wait for death. The kingdom of heaven is overcoming the power of death on earth

right now. The appropriate response today is repentance and faith. It is to allow God to change our minds about the world we are experiencing today, and to trust God's hand in our affairs. It is to recognize the presence of God among us, that the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ comes in frail humanity wherever he is believed.

If you are an adult or parent, you have seen people who are loved but cannot receive it. Their thinking prevents them from receiving and enjoying love. That is what happened to a prodigal son. He went to a foreign land, squandering his life and inheritance. All the time, he was loved by his wealthy father. He suffered while his wealthy father longed for him to return. When he finally came to his senses and returned, he was treated as a son, not a slave. He was given his father's ring and robe. He was honored with a great feast because he was loved so much. Unfortunately, his older brother couldn't receive that love either. He was so into duty and fairness that he couldn't see his father's love that favored him from birth.

Can you see God's love that has favored you from birth? Can you see his kindness to you? Do you hear his appeal through the messengers he has sent to you? Do you believe the message of his Son who declares that this is the time of God's favor, the day of personal breakthroughs?

Do you like Tony think I'm privileged and you're cursed? You are not hopelessly flawed, condemned, or consigned to a sad fate. You were born for God's glory. It is Satan who picks with you. God pulls for you... all the way to the cross. The Spirit of Jesus is here now to bring glory to God through his great work in you.

In Holy Communion you welcome Jesus' forgiveness and life in you. Just ask for it. If you would like me to personally pray for you today, just stay where you are at as we dismiss tables. I'll pray for you even as others come and go because today is the day of favor.