

# Radical Forgiveness

Luke 7:36-50  
November 11, 2007

## Introduction:

Someone once said that forgiveness is a lovely idea until one actually has something to forgive. Forgiveness of sin is at the very heart of our faith, and while it is something that we talk about, read about, pray about, do every week as a part of our liturgy, it is also something that is often neglected by Christians in both receiving and extending. Instead of breeding outright contempt, familiarity breeds a forgetfulness of the radical nature of forgiveness.

## Text:

*One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner..."* (Luke 7:36-50)

## Context:

This section of Scripture follows on Jesus' interaction with the crowds which consisted of repentant scoundrels and unrepentant religious leaders and professionals (Lk. 7:29-30). Those who had received John's teaching and had been baptized also believed in Christ. But those who had rejected John—the Pharisees and the lawyers—also rejected Jesus. They thought John was too ascetic and strict and therefore had a demon, and Jesus too free and liberal, a friend of crooks and low-lives. And so it is for many people today. Christianity is either too religious or not religious enough. Jesus' response—"Yet wisdom is justified by all her children" (v35)—is exemplified by his interaction with this woman and Simon.

## Eating with and Touching Sinners vv.36-39

Although despised by the Pharisees, Jesus is willing to eat with Simon. And although the woman was a notorious "sinner" (*hamartolos*; cf. Is. 14:5), Jesus is willing to eat with her as well. He reveals what a true prophet acts like—doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God (Mic. 6:8). Covenant-keepers have always been this way (Job 14:4; Ps. 19:13; Ps. 51).

## Forgiven Much vv.40-47

We don't know the details of her sin, but the woman's sorrow and Jesus' comparison of great debt indicates that she hadn't just changed lanes without signaling. There is real sin, real brokenness, sadness, and pain as a result of what she has done. Notice she lays it *all* down before Jesus without hanging on to any good things she had done, minimizing her sins in comparison to others, or blaming anyone else for what she did. This is true confession that names the sin accurately and doesn't pretend good intentions (1 John 1:9).

## Loves Much vv. 48–50

Having been forgiven, the woman is free to go and live in peace, and to forgive others in the same way she has been forgiven. Wisdom is justified by her children. Those sitting around the table with Jesus should have asked not just *who* is this who forgives sins, but if he would also forgive *their* sin as well. But he who is forgiven little, loves little. The one who confesses honestly to God is empowered to also confess to people, and also to forgive in the same way he has been forgiven. The world knows nothing of this radical forgiveness but by grace will be intrigued to know who is behind it when they see it.

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