

# For the Love of God

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## Introduction

### The Text

We remember that Jesus has here turned to the crowd to speak to them of John the Baptist. He first elevates John as His forerunner and the greatest among men. But He then shows how John has played his part and things are now transitioning towards Jesus and the kingdom He is establishing. And then in v. 29 we read this:

<sup>29</sup> (When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John,<sup>30</sup> but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.)

<sup>31</sup> “To what then shall I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like?”

<sup>32</sup> They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, “‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep.’”

<sup>33</sup> For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’<sup>34</sup> The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’<sup>35</sup> Yet wisdom is justified by all her children.”

<sup>36</sup> One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee’s house and reclined at table.<sup>37</sup> 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,<sup>38</sup> 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.<sup>39</sup> 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.”<sup>40</sup> And Jesus answering said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” And he answered, “Say it, Teacher.”

<sup>41</sup> “A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.<sup>42</sup> When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?”<sup>43</sup> Simon answered, “The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.” And he said to him, “You have judged rightly.”<sup>44</sup> Then 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.<sup>45</sup> You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet.<sup>46</sup> You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.<sup>47</sup> Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.”<sup>48</sup> And he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”<sup>49</sup> Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this, who even forgives sins?”<sup>50</sup> And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” (Luke 7:29–50)

### One Sermon?

A. At first it might seem strange to bring all of these verses together in one sermon. The discussion in vv. 29-35 might seem like something separate altogether from the story recorded in vv. 36-50. But, when one looks a little closer we see a surprising connection.

- B. Broadly speaking (and this will serve as the basic outline for our time together), in vv. 29-35, two different groups of people are introduced. And then, in vv. 36-50, these two different groups are illustrated for us—with a representative from each held out for us to observe and learn from.

## (1) Two Different Groups Introduced (vv. 29-35)

### Divided and Distinguished

- A. In the opening section of our text, we see the people around Jesus now starting to divide into two groups.
1. On the one hand, we have what He calls down in v. 35, the Children of Wisdom: “[W]isdom is justified by all her children.”
  2. On the other hand, we have what He calls there in v. 31 “the people of this generation”—or, given the analogy He uses to describe them in v. 32, we might also call them the “Children” of this Generation.
- B. Now, each of these two groups is identified and distinguished particularly by the way they respond to the ministries of John and Jesus. The Children of Wisdom receive them. The Children of this Generation reject them.
1. V. 29 begins with the Children of Wisdom: “(When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John . . .” (You remember “wisdom is justified by all her children” (v. 35), well, here wisdom’s children are justifying the wisdom and ways of God.)
    - a. John the Baptist comes saying: “You need to repent of your sin and be baptized or the coming kingdom of Christ won’t go well for you.” And they say: “Okay. We’re going to go with God on this one. If God says I need to repent, if God says something’s off, I’ll go with that, even if it hurts my ego.”
      - i. They receive what God is doing in John and are put on trajectory towards Jesus and His kingdom of grace.
  2. But v. 30 continues on from v. 29 and introduces us to the Children of this Generation: “. . . but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.)”
    - a. John the Baptist comes saying: “You need to repent of your sin and be baptized or the coming kingdom of Christ won’t go well for you.” And they say: “Are you kidding me? We’re the religious leaders in Israel. Who do you think you are? We don’t need your baptism of repentance.”
- C. So, interestingly, it’s the common people, the tax collector and the sinner, who are opening their hearts to God’s word and directive. Meanwhile the religious elite, those who should know better, are stonewalling.

1. As Jesus will later say in rebuke of the chief priests and elders of Israel: “<sup>31</sup> Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.<sup>32</sup> For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds . . .” (Matt 21:31–32).

## A Piercing Parable

- A. In vv. 31-33, Jesus goes on to further describe this second group, these Children of this Generation, by telling a parable.
- B. The essence of it is this: Instead of accepting God’s directive to them—which would move them from repentance in John to salvation and joy in Jesus—they proceed to issue their directives to God:
  1. They say: “John, you’re too ascetic, you’re too serious, always fasting, living in the wilderness, always focused on sin and repentance. Let’s play a song you can dance to.”
    - a. But he wouldn’t do it: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 3:2).
  2. They say: “Jesus, you are way too lax, gluttonous, you’re a drunk, eating and celebrating with tax collectors and sinners, paying no attention to our fasts and our Sabbaths. Let’s play a song you can weep to.”
    - a. But he wouldn’t do it: “Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?” (Luke 5:34).
- C. John represents grief over our sin; Jesus represents gratitude for God’s grace. John comes with fasting; Jesus comes with feasting. John helps us repent; Jesus helps us rejoice.
  1. The Children of this Generation, the religious elite, reject both. Because they reject John (“Why should I repent?”), they will also reject Jesus (“Why would I celebrate?”). They don’t want to face their sin, so they will miss the Savior.
    - a. I don’t want us to miss it!

## (2) Two Different Groups Illustrated (vv. 36-50)

### Two Representatives

- A. Luke doesn’t want us to miss it. That’s why, in vv. 36-50 of our text, he brings out from each of these two groups a single representative for us to observe and learn from.
  1. As representative of the Children of this Generation, we meet a Pharisee named Simon (v. 36).
  2. As representative of the Children of Wisdom, we meet “a woman of the city, who was a sinner” (v. 37). (Scholarly conjecture is that she was probably coming from a life of prostitution, though we can’t really know for sure.)

## The Contrast

A. Let's begin here by observing how these two representatives are contrasted against one another.

1. On the one hand, this sinful woman is (1) desperate, (2) humble, and (3) lavish.
2. On the other hand, Simon the Pharisee is (1) composed, (2) critical, and (3) calculated.

B. We will take these contrasts one pair at a time, and use them as sort of diagnostic tool to examine our own hearts and lives before Christ.

### (1) Are We Desperate or Are We Composed?

A. This sinful woman, no doubt, is marked with a sense of desperation. She wasn't invited to this banquet that's taking place. But she doesn't care. She's going to get in the mix. We read in v. 37 that: "she learned that [Jesus] was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house", and then, suddenly, in v. 38, she's there!

1. And she looks a bit crazy, right? Tears gushing from her eyes as if from a burst pipe. Hair all disheveled and crisscrossing her face. Snot, no doubt, running from nose over lips as if she were a little child again. Face to the floor . . . at Jesus' feet.

a. She's desperate. And she has this sense, this faith, that He can help.

B. In contrast, Simon is, and remains throughout this whole evening, quite composed. He knows nothing of the desperation shown by this woman here. In fact, her behavior is quite offensive to him. He would never let himself stoop to such things.

1. Scribes and Pharisees, you remember, " <sup>38</sup> . . . like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces <sup>39</sup> and [like having] the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, <sup>40</sup> . . . and for a pretense make long prayers" (Mark 12:38-40).

a. Religion for them is all about composure, looking good, enhancing image.

C. This is probably why Simon invited Jesus into his home in the first place. He knew it would cause a stir in the community: "Did you hear who Simon is having at his house?!"

1. He invited Jesus in as a way of padding his own reputation in the neighborhood. He's not desperate and on the floor. He's reclining at the table with Him, conversing as if with an equal.

D. What about us? Are we desperate before Jesus or composed? Do we come to Him as wretched sinners in need of a salvation only He can provide? Or do we come as pretty decent people who are just hoping for a little help with our image?

1. To get at this another way: When's the last time you cried, I mean really cried, in church? We are more desperate for Jesus than we ever could know.

## (2) Are We Humble or Are We Critical?

- A. The threefold reference to Jesus' feet there in v. 38 serves to highlight this sinful woman's humility.
  - 1. One commentator reminds us: "To attend to the feet was a menial task, one assigned to a slave" (TNTC). But this woman is saying: "Just let me attend to Your feet. What an honor that would be!"
- B. In contrast, Simon does not hesitate to elevate himself over those in our text. He has a sense of superiority and with it comes a critical spirit.
  - 1. We read something interesting there in v. 39: "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.'"
    - a. And with this he condemns both this woman and Jesus Himself.
- C. But did you catch that little phrase there: "what sort of woman this is"? Simon had already sorted her in his mind.
  - 1. There are the righteous—they walk a certain way, talk a certain way, look a certain way—and then there are the sinners. "O I know the sort. And you should too, Jesus. I thought you were prophet!"
- D. But Jesus turns to Simon down in v. 44 and asks a question that we dare not pass over: "Do you see this woman?"
  - 1. This is not just a rhetorical question here. This is for real. "Simon, do you actually see this woman? Because I don't think you do. You cannot truly see what you've already sorted. You Pharisees, you're always looking at appearances, but I'm looking at the heart. There's something beautiful going on with this woman right now . . . and you can't even see it!"
- E. It is important to note that sometimes the church gets it wrong. The people claiming to represent God miss His heart entirely. This was not just a scribe and Pharisee thing. It happens in Christian churches even today.
  - 1. Perhaps it's even happened to you. Maybe you've come looking for grace from the church and found only condemnation. They sort you without truly seeing you—with their pursed lips, their pointer fingers, and their cold shoulders.
    - a. But hear me: That is not the heart of Jesus. He lets this sinful woman break in and touch Him. And He doesn't scold her for it, He commends her. Grace doesn't sort you. It doesn't pigeonhole or box you in. It's lets you start again and gives you the power to do it!
      - i. There's hope for the sinner here . . . in Christ.

- F. So, bringing it back to this contrast, what about us? Do we come to church humble—in awe that you even get to be here in God’s presence? Or do we come critical—sorting and judging everyone and everything?

### (3) Are We Lavish or Are We Calculated?

- A. A Pharisee’s love was always so calculated. They followed the law to the letter. So, as it calls for in [Lev 27:30](#), they would give Him a tenth, a tithe, of the yield of every seed they ever planted—down to “mint and dill and cumin” Jesus says in [Matt 23:23](#).

1. But in all their meticulous calculations they failed to give Him the most important thing of all: their hearts.

- B. And that’s what we see this woman pouring out to Jesus here.

1. Jesus Himself contrasts Simon’s calculated love, with the lavish love of this woman: “<sup>44</sup> 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.<sup>45</sup> You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet.<sup>46</sup> You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment” (vv. 44-46).

- a. There’s no calculation here. There’s just lavish love!

- C. So what about us? Do we do our Christian thing, our Bible studies, our tithing, our fellowship, all the while our hearts are set on something else? Or does Jesus have all of us?!

### The Secret

- A. So now we need to ask: What accounts for the difference here? Why desperate, humble, and lavish for one and composed, critical, and calculated for the other?

1. And how do we become more like this woman and less like Simon? What’s the secret to her whole-hearted affection and unashamed love? Don’t you want that? I want that! How do we get it?

- B. Well, Jesus tells Simon how in the little parable He shares in vv. 41-42: “<sup>41</sup> A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii [a typical day’s wage], and the other fifty.<sup>42</sup> When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?”

1. The answer is plain. The greater the debt cancelled, the greater the love. Or, as Jesus sums it up down in v. 47: “Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.”

- a. Her great love is an indication of a great forgiveness.

- C. Now, to be clear, Jesus is not saying that this woman has a greater amount of sin than Simon. He is saying that this woman has a greater awareness of her sin than Simon. And, therefore, she has a greater appreciation for the offer of forgiveness that has come to her in Christ.

1. Remember, she stands as a representative of those Children of Wisdom, those who have received God's word to them in John, a word about repentance, a word about the judgment due us for our sin.
  - a. It's not a popular word in our day (or any day for that matter). But it's a word that prepares you for the joy of knowing Jesus!
  
- D. If you aren't willing to let God show you the depths of your sin, then He can never take you to the heights of His grace in Christ. And your heart will never come alive in love for Him like this woman's does.
  1. Spurgeon puts it this way: "Too many think lightly of sin, and therefore think lightly of the Savior. He who has stood before his God, convicted and condemned, with the rope about his neck, is the man to weep for joy when he is pardoned . . ."
  
- E. God is everywhere in the Scriptures trying to help us with this. If we are unwilling to square with our own sinfulness and the wrath we deserve from a holy God because of it, then there is so much in our Bible's that will just be lost on us.
  1. How else are you going to make sense of God opening up the floodgates of heaven and just washing the earth clean in Noah's day, killing man, woman, and child?
  2. Or the great Exodus from Egypt that was precipitated by the slaughtering of all the firstborn kids in Egypt?
  3. Or the conquest of Canaan as Israel marches into the promised land over the dead bodies of these pagan people?
  4. What about when God does free His people from Egypt and brings them to Mount Sinai and then He turns and says: "Yeah I know I've saved you and I'm bringing you to Myself, but don't you dare come up this mountain, don't even touch it, or I'll have to kill you" (Exo 19)?! "Woah, God, chill out. I thought we were tight." What's that?
  5. Or when He gets them into the promised land and they construct the temple, why does He say? "Listen, every year, one of you, only one of you, the High Priest, you've got to bring the blood of sacrificed animals into the Most Holy Place, where I meet with you, over the mercy seat, and just wash that place down. Put blood everywhere. How else can a holy God dwell alongside a sinful people?!"

## The Cross

- A. What's God doing with all of this? What's He doing with all this talk about our sin and deserving of death? What's He doing with John and the call to repent and flee from the wrath to come?
  1. Well, to put it simply: He's preparing us for the joy of salvation in Jesus.
    - a. He knows that, until we see the horror of our sin and what it deserves, we will never see the wonder of His grace. And if we never see the wonder of His grace, we will never love Jesus like this woman—desperate, humble, lavish.

- B. Because, don't you see, all this talk throughout the OT of judgment and wrath, that's what's bottled, corked, and then given to Jesus to drink down upon the cross . . . for the sake of sinners like you and me. To cancel our debts!
1. “<sup>13</sup> [Y]ou, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,<sup>14</sup> by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross” (Col 2:13–14).
- C. This is how he can turn to this sinful woman in the last verses of our text and say: <sup>48</sup> “Your sins are forgiven. . . .<sup>50</sup> Your faith has saved you; go in peace” (vv. 48, 50).

## The Wedding Dress

- A. As I was thinking about this woman and the very real possibility that she was a prostitute, I thought of a song I used to love called Wedding Dress by Derek Webb.
1. The lyrics remind me that my sin and idolatry is spiritual adultery, even spiritual prostitution. They remind me that I am no different than this woman, that I too should be on the floor with her, in tears, at the Savior's feet.
- B. Let me close by reading you a few lines: “If you could love me as a wife / And for my wedding gift your life / Should that be all I'll ever need / Or is there more I'm looking for / . . . 'Cause I am so easily satisfied / By the call of lovers so less wild / That I would take a little cash / Over your very flesh and blood / I am a whore, I do confess / But I put you on just like a wedding dress / And I run down the aisle / I run down the aisle / I'm a prodigal with no way home / But I put you on just like a ring of gold / And I run down the aisle / I run down the aisle to you.”
- C. In case you're worried about the language it's lifted straight from scriptures like Ezek 16. No one wants to say: “Spiritually I've been like a prostitute a whore putting my affection, my love, my hope on everything other than the One truly worthy of it. I've been cheating on you God.”
1. But as we let God bring us under conviction and we wonder if He'll ever have us back, He puts forward his son. And Revelation says that, “in the blood of the Lamb” (7:14), we wash our garments white and essentially run down the aisle to the wedding feast of in ch. 19.
    - a. Now that ought to make your heart sing!