

Extravagant Worship is a lifestyle

Luke 7:36-50

Back in the early nineties, there was a television show called, Life Styles of the Rich and Famous. The show, hosted by Robin Leach, featured the extravagant lifestyles of wealthy entertainers, athletes, socialites and business Tycoons.

After touring their opulent mansions, sailing on their private yachts, and flying in their private jets, Leach would end each episode with his signature catchphrase, offering his viewers, “champagne wishes and caviar dreams.”

There are similar reality shows today that also give their viewers a behind the scenes look at the lifestyles of the wealthy. But in addition to featuring extravagant lifestyles, they also depict the debase and depraved lifestyles of people, which has a corrupting appeal in our society today.

What many in our world view as the “good life” not only involves having the wealth to “go all out’ to pamper and please oneself, but also to indulge one’s sensual desires.

You don’t have to watch these shows to know that living an extravagant lifestyle of self-indulgence doesn’t lead to a deeply joyful and meaningful life. In fact, what these lifestyles of “sparing no expense” to indulge one’s appetites demonstrate is that more is never enough.

From our text this morning we are going to look at a woman whose relationship with Jesus meant more to her than the most precious thing she possessed.

She loved and worshiped Jesus extravagantly—she lavished him with expressions of love and gratitude for who He is and what He did for her.

In contrast to her extravagant worship, we will also examine the attitude of a religious man who was cold and indifferent to Jesus. We are going to consider not only why he was cold and indifferent, but why he also had no grace for the woman who deeply loved Jesus.

Main idea: The more we comprehend the love God lavished on us through Christ, the greater our capacity will be to love Him and others extravagantly.

1. The Arrogance of the Pharisee

After Jesus validated the eternally significant ministry of John the Baptist before a polarized crowd, which consisted of His disciples and Jewish religious leaders, a Pharisee invited Jesus to eat with him.

Before we examine what transpired in this man's house, it's important we understand who the Pharisees were in Jesus' day.

The word Pharisee is derived from a Hebrew word meaning separated. They were an influential religious sect within Judaism. Moreover, they were known for their emphasis on personal piety, adherence to oral traditions, and their teaching that all Jews should observe all 600-plus laws in the Torah.

The Pharisees accepted the written Word as inspired by God. However, they wrongly gave equal authority to oral tradition, which they believed and taught went all the way back to Moses. This Pharisaic tradition, which evolved over the centuries, had the effect of adding to God's Word, which is forbidden by scripture (Deuteronomy 4:2; Mark 7:7).¹

Now with this background, let me read Luke 7:36-39, and unpack our first point: The Arrogance of a Pharisee:

¹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Pharisees.html>

“One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. ³⁷ 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, ³⁸ 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. 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.” Luke 7:36-39

Why did this Pharisee invite Jesus over to his house to eat? Was it because he believed in Jesus and wanted to hear what he had to say?

A close reading of this passage suggests that he invited him over to find something to accuse him of. We see also that he had disdain for the woman, who was a notorious sinner—more than likely a prostitute.

This is inferred from verse 37, which identifies the woman as a sinner, which likely means that her sinful lifestyle was not hidden. This leads most commentators to conclude that she was likely a prostitute.

Now because of her reputation, this religious man did not appreciate the expressions of love and gratitude that the woman poured out on Jesus.

Later, we will examine more closely what was behind the woman's extravagant expressions of worship. But before we do, it's important that we examine what was in the heart of this Pharisee who had such disdain for the woman.

Knowing what this man was thinking, Jesus proceeds to share with him a parable to expose the arrogance and pride of his heart:

“And Jesus answering said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” And he answered, “Say it, Teacher.” ⁴¹ “A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other

fifty. 42 When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" 43 Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." Luke 7:40-43

There are some important things to note about the debts that the two men owed in this parable:

First, the debts represent sin.

Now, likening sin to indebtedness has value in making it clear that sin is not something vaguely unpleasant. Instead, sin, like a debt, is something that comes between people and more consequentially it's something that comes between us and God with serious and eternal implications.

Secondly, this parable pictures two people who have debts they cannot pay (v.42).

This is a very serious thing because where there is a debt justice demands that a payment be made. When it is not paid, there are consequences.

This is another seriously important reason the bible also likens our sins to a debt. You see, we all have a sin debt we cannot pay and we all deserve judgment as a result. Justice demands payment for our sin.

Concerning the parable, one commentator explains:

"The debtors in this mini-parable are, of course, metaphorical for sinners. Both men have considerable debts because a denarius was equivalent to one day's wage for a common working man. Quite simply, it would take fifty working days to eliminate the one man's debt, and five hundred for the other! These were incredible debts considering that average wages were barely sufficient for survival. What Jesus was saying was that according to conventional, outward

morality, the woman was a “five hundred” sinner and Simon a “fifty sinner.”

Outwardly she was ten times as sinful. But of course, the penetrating point is that they were both sinners. One had ten times the volume of outward sin, but they were both guilty inside. The “high-class” moralist had the same problem as the “low-class” prostitute. Simon apparently did not have the slightest understanding of this and is thus a good representative of thousands of religious sinners who have lived and died in the succeeding years. [Their outward religious practices give them a false spiritual security and blind them to their greatest need, namely forgiveness of sin.]

Jesus’ point is not only that both Simon the moralist and the prostitute were debtors/sinners, but that both were equally insolvent. If you are unable to pay, it does not matter how great the debt is. You are insolvent, period! And that is the condition of the whole human race. *‘For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God’* (Romans 3:23).
Kent Hughes, Commentary on Luke

You know, there are people who have such enormous credit card debt and the interest they’re paying on it is so high that unless they come up with a financial plan and make significant changes it will take them a lifetime to pay it off. They’ve dug such a big hole financially that it feels almost impossible to climb out of.

But how many of you know, no matter how bad your financial debt might be, it pales in comparison to the eternal debt we owe because of sin. Apart from the grace of God, we are all in a horrible pit of sin, we all have a sin debt that we cannot climb out of. Romans 3:23

A third reason why sin is likened to a debt is that **when a debt is forgiven it doesn’t just simply go away. The person doing the forgiving incurs the debt.**

Now, Jesus makes the grace of God’s forgiveness available to all who believe. But Jesus didn’t simply sweep our sin debt under the rug. He

paid the price for our sin on the cross with His life. And in so doing, He satisfied the just demands of a Holy God (2 Cor. 5:21).

In light of this, notice that after Jesus gives the parable about the two debtors who were forgiven debts they could not pay, he asked the Pharisee:

Now which of them will love him more?" (v.42b).

And Simon the Pharisee answered correctly by saying:

"The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." Luke 7:43a

Now this speaks to the main point of this parable:

The depth of our love for the Lord is vitally linked to our understanding of how much we've been forgiven—how much God loves us.

In verse 47, Jesus further explains His point when He said the following about the woman who washed His feet with her tears:

"Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." Luke 7:47

What is the heavenly meaning of the Parable, which explains why some love much and some love little?

Jesus is not saying that your capacity to love God is contingent on the number of sins or the degree of the sin you've been forgiven of. Rather, your love for God is tied to the depth of your awareness of how much you've been forgiven.

As the apostle John explained in 1 John 4:19: "We love because he first loved us."

One Christian writer puts it this way: “The scope of one’s love depends on one’s perception of the scope of one’s forgiveness.”

Moreover, the degree of your love for God is not only tied to your awareness of your sin debt, but also to the costliness of your forgiveness. You can be forgiven because Jesus incur the debt, He bore the judgment of the debt of your sin on the cross of Calvary.

One reason so many today are unaware of the need for forgiveness made available through Christ’s substitutionary sacrifice, is that they compare themselves with others rather than to the holiness of God.

Have you ever asked a person you were witnessing to the question: “If you were to die today, would you go to heaven or hell?” I’ve asked others that question and a common answer goes something like this:

“Well, I’m a pretty good person. I’ve never killed anyone or committed a serious crime. I think I will go to heaven.” The average person perceives that they are good enough to make it to heaven because they compare themselves with other people. If you compare yourself with others, you can always find someone who is a worse sinner in your eyes and feel that you may be good enough to get heaven.

The major problem with this way of thinking is that God doesn’t judge us by comparing us to others, but according to His holy standards. And based on His righteous standards and Holiness, we all fall short.

The problem with this Pharisee was that in his self-righteousness (which was the result of comparing himself with others) he was blinded to how great a sinner he was and how great his need for forgiveness was.

Consequently, he not only failed to receive the forgiveness found in Jesus, he was also unable to express the kind of worship and love that this woman lavished on Jesus.

Now this leads us to our next point:

2. The Adoration of a Prostitute

Notice the way Jesus describes how the woman expresses her love and gratitude for him:

“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. ⁴⁵ You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. ⁴⁷ Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.” Luke 7:44-47

In contrast to the self-righteous Pharisee, who did not even do what was customary in ancient Jewish times when they invited someone over for dinner, like provide for one’s feet to be washed, the woman showed extravagant love to Jesus.

Remember that in addition to kissing the feet of Jesus and washing them with her hair and tears, verse 37 explains that she anointed His feet with ointment from an alabaster box. The Greek word translated “alabaster box” as well as “flask,” “jar” and “vial” in other translations, can also mean “perfume vase.”

“Those who have studied ancient customs, says one bible teacher, “tell us prostitutes of that day often wore a vial of perfume hanging by a cord around their necks. [This vial was very costly]. What’s more, in a culture where bathing was infrequent, a pleasant fragrance would have been their stock in trade. A drop or two would be used to entice prospective customers. But the language used in this passage, [which includes the word anointed], indicated she poured out all her perfume. Do you see the significance of what she did? She broke the vial to anoint Jesus with the perfume. She [used up] the tools of her trade. It was her way of saying “I won’t need this anymore. I’m making a clean break with my past.” Then she began to kiss Jesus’ feet. This was not uncommon in ancient times because it was one of the ways a beaten

enemy surrendered to the one who had won the battle. It was not only a sign of affection from this woman. It was her way of saying, “I surrender to you Jesus. You have won. I give up. Your grace has conquered [my soul, my affections, my all.]”

What a beautiful picture of adoration and worship!

When Jesus says in verse 47, “*Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much,*”

He is not saying that because of how she expresses her love that she is forgiven of her many sins, but that in light of her expressions of love and gratitude, one can conclude that she’s been forgiven of many sins.

In verse 50, Jesus further explains that it was her faith in Him that saved her: “*And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”*” Luke 7:50

So because Jesus is pointing to her expressions of love and gratitude as the fruit of one who has been forgiven, most commentators conclude that she previously had a saving encounter with Jesus. And that His interaction with her in the Pharisee’s house is an affirmation of the forgiveness that He had already bestowed upon her.

Now, the woman that lavished Jesus with such expressions of love did not do so because she was trying to draw attention to herself. Rather she was so overcome with the realization of all that Jesus had done for her that she couldn’t restrain her spontaneous display of emotion.

By contrast, Simon the Pharisee, who had hosted the dinner, was incensed. In his self-righteous state of mind, this woman’s behavior, indeed her very presence seemed utterly inappropriate.

What about you and me? Do you have such a love for God and gratitude for what Jesus has done for you that at times you can't restrain your emotional expressions of worship? Or are you like the Pharisee? Not only do you have no passion for God, but it bothers you that others do, especially when they express it publicly.

This brings us to our final point:

3. The Attitude of the Pardoned

Are we more like the woman or the Pharisee? Do you possess the attitude of the pardoned or the attitude of the Pharisee?

When our eyes are focused on the cross—when they're opened to see how much we've been forgiven and the price that Jesus paid to secure that forgiveness, we will love Him with total abandonment, and our hearts will be filled with grace towards others.

Our love for God will be seen in our actions—not only in our expression of humility, love, and worship, but especially in our relationships with others.

The fruit of knowing that we are forgiven sinners, loved by God, will show by the way we radically love one another.

The opposite is true. The fruit of a Christian who has lost sight of the cross and how much they are loved and forgiven by God will show in how little they love.

But there's something even much deeper that demonstrates what true love and worship of Jesus looks like. Remember that when she poured out the perfume on Jesus, she was using up the tools of her trade.

That is to say, this wasn't a momentary emotional response to Jesus, she was surrendering her life to Jesus.

Her former life was not just about satisfying her sinful appetites, it was her livelihood, it was how she survived. But although there weren't many other employment options for a former prostitute, she did not allow worldly security to keep her from yielding to the will of God for her life and no doubt serving His kingdom purpose.

Beloved, worship is more than exuberant outward and visible expression of praise and adoration. True worship is a lifestyle of giving all of yourself to all that God is for you in Christ. Romans 12:1-3

The woman in the Pharisee's house wasn't just giving lip service to Jesus, she was acknowledging and demonstrating that in Him she found all that her soul longed for.

I want to submit to you today that what will lead to a life of true contentment and satisfaction is not "going all out" to please yourself but "going all out" to please and serve Jesus who went all out on the cross for you.

As one bible teacher put it: "Underneath all of our physical longings, there's actually a much bigger spiritual longing." Melissa Kruger

Where are you today? Are you more like the woman or the Pharisee? Do we love the Lord and people, especially those in need of much grace, extravagantly? Do we go all out only when it comes to pleasing ourselves or do we go all out for Jesus and His cause?

Are we just looking to Jesus to give us worldly security, a better job, or to help us find a husband or a wife? Or are we finding in Him and in His love, demonstrated on the cross, our ultimate security and satisfaction?

Can I tell you, until you find that Jesus is enough, nothing will be enough?

That's what true love and worship is: living in a way that demonstrates that Jesus is enough, that there's nothing you will not lay down to honor and serve Him.

Are we more like the woman who worshiped extravagantly or are we more like the Pharisee who was cold and indifferent to Jesus and to people who need Jesus? If you're more like the Pharisee, it could be that you've lost sight of the cross.

Conclusion

Wherever we may be today, let's seek the Lord to open the eyes of our hearts by His Spirit to see the cross with a fresh and renewed perspective—to see the cross in a way that will move us to express our love for Him and others extravagantly.

Let's endeavor to see all people not through a self-righteous lens, but from a cross perspective knowing that it's by the matchless grace of Jesus that we've received costly forgiveness and the extravagant gift of eternal life.

Do you love Jesus extravagantly today? Are you unreservedly open to God's will for you — whatever it may be? Do you trust that in God's will lies your deepest security and satisfaction, no matter what He wants to do with you? Are you willing to abandon yourself to Him so that He can lead you to a deeply joyful and meaningful life?

Perhaps your honest response is, "I'm not willing to abandon everything to God." If that is where you are, then be real with God about it. God will always hear the prayer, "Lord, I am unwilling, but make me willing to be willing."