

Saman Gunan is a name you may have heard recently. Saman, who was a Thai Navy SEAL, died this week in the bowels of the Tham Luang Nang Non cave system in Thailand. He was on a mission to get oxygen to a youth soccer team that has become trapped in an underground cave. Apparently, in spite of warnings to not, the team ventured into the caves to perform a rite of passage where they would swim across one of the caves and carve their name into the opposite wall. But, due to a flash flood, they were forced further into the cave system and became trapped a kilometer below the surface, where they have been the last two weeks. They were discovered by divers a week into their ordeal, but this wasn't an easy swim straight down. According to reports, the trek from the entrance of the caves to the boys is a perilous three to five-hour swim through jagged, narrow spaces and murky water. Saman ran out of oxygen during his return trip.

The team's situation is dire. Authorities are scrambling to figure out how to rescue them. They are pumping out millions of gallons of water, but they are currently in monsoon season, and rain has fallen all weekend. They are considering an option of outfitting the boys with scuba gear and having them swim out. But none of the boys know how to swim. Their situation is desperate. They can't save themselves. They need to be rescued.

If this team is ultimately saved, and we pray that they are, how do you think they are going to feel about Saman Gunan? My guess is abundantly thankful. They will probably have services to honor him. They will connect with and thank his family. And in their hearts, they will likely have a deep love for him because of the price he paid so that they could live.

This morning, as we continue our series called *Awkward Family Photos*, we are going to take a look at one of the most awkward moments in the Gospels. We are going to a dinner party, but this will be unlike any dinner party you or I have ever attended. This moment has three characters involved: Jesus, along with a Pharisee and a woman, both of whom will be confronted with their desperate reality, this one being spiritual. And by the end of the party, these three will show us that **the greater your grasp of what you have been forgiven, the greater your love for the one who has forgiven you.** When we truly understand who God is, who we are before him, and what he has done to make us right, to rescue us, our hearts will erupt with love and worship. One of them gets it. The other doesn't.

**[Luke 7:36-43] <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."**

I don't know about you, but I've never seen anything like that happen at a party. Let's start by looking at the woman. Isn't it interesting what Luke tells us about her? She is identified only as a woman of the city. It's clear she has a reputation, and it's not a good one. And she doesn't speak. She has no name, no status, and no words, but her actions alone make her an example for all of us. She likely had a previous encounter with Jesus where her eyes were opened to the truth, and now her Messiah is reclined at a table in her city, and she can't help but worship.

**She worships boldly.** Luke introduces her with "behold!" There is a sense of urgency to her actions. She finds out Jesus is eating at this house, and she moves immediately to be in his presence. While social customs allowed for townspeople to hang around and listen when a teacher was at someone's house (everything was open), and needy people were allowed to visit and share in the leftovers, those of ill-repute, and women in general, were not invited inside. But offending the cultural norms and exposing herself to the disapproval others didn't stop her. She sees an opportunity to love the Lord, and she takes it.

**She worships lavishly.** She brought with her an alabaster flask of ointment and poured it on his feet. This is expensive stuff. She dedicated to Jesus what, very well, could have been her most valuable possession, and she used it to serve him. This is more than a ceremonial anointing. It's a loving act to care for a guy who is on his feet all day. Works can be worship. We sometimes get into this mindset that worship is limited to singing and praising. But what we do in the name of Jesus, for the sake of Jesus, is worship. Jesus said, "what you do for the least of these, you do for me." When we serve out of a Christ-centered motivation, we are worshipping the Lord.

**She worships shamelessly.** I think that's why we find this passage so awkward. This woman is completely vulnerable, and she loves Jesus with abandon. Because of her reputation, she exposes herself to public ridicule. She literally throws herself down at the feet of another person. She lets her hair down in public, which is almost tantamount to nakedness. She dirties herself, cleaning the one physically who made her clean spiritually. And she kisses Jesus' feet, the ultimate act of respect, submission, and affection. She is all in for Jesus, and she doesn't care how it looks to others.

I had to ask myself this week if I would characterize my worship of the Lord as bold, lavish, and shameless. Do I worship him no matter what? Do I give God my very best? Do I lay down my pride and my worry of others' perception to give him all of myself? The answer I came up with was: not always. There are times it's reserved, it's safe, it costs little, and it occurs when it's convenient for me. How about you? Do you worship regularly? Do you give to God what is most valuable to you? Do you serve him with a heart of worship? As the culture continues to have a less favorable view of Christians, are you willing to be known as one? If you struggle to answer "yes" to all of those, perhaps we can learn from the woman in this story. How is it that she could worship like this?

We get the answer in Jesus' parable. The title of "sinner" described both her social status and her spiritual state. At some point, she recognized who God is and how far short she had fallen of his standard. She owned her sin, owned her desperation, and recognized she had a debt she could not pay. And while she didn't yet have the Cross and empty tomb, forgiveness was offered to her by Jesus, and she accepted it. This woman who had been ostracized from social and religious

society and living distant from God, now found herself forgiven and restored. Her only fitting response was to love deeply and worship intensely.

I believe one of the greatest challenges to us living a worshipful life is truly coming to grips with our depravity. The world balks at the idea that there is anything inherently wrong with us. Whether it's the self-esteem movement, the idea that everyone is special, or the philosophy to live your truth, the belief all of us are broken is wildly unpopular. But until we get there, until we own it for ourselves, we'll have a hard time loving and worshipping like this woman.

I received an email this week from one of our members I wanted to share with you, with permission, because I suspect it reflects what some of us feel. She said, "I'm up in my head this morning. I was talking to Jesus and thanking Him for being there to keep me company. As I was doing that, I realized that I don't think Him dying for me has reached my heart. I know that in my head but it's like I see Him more as a best friend than a savior." Does that sound like you? I believe the key is truly grasping what you've been forgiven.

Here's the hard truth that helps with that: You're not as bad as you think you are. You're worse! But that revelation is the key to worshipping like the woman. **Recognizing our depravity is the doorway to God's grace.** When we recognize our depravity, we acknowledge the majesty and holiness of God. When we recognize our depravity, we understand we are desperate, owing a debt we cannot pay. When we recognize our depravity, we accept our abundant need for God's abundant grace, and we receive it eagerly. And when that happens, you won't be able to sit still or keep your mouth shut. You won't be able to help but worship, because the greater our grasp of what we've been forgiven, the greater our love for the one who forgives us. That's what we see in this woman, and that's why she's an example to us.

That's a far cry from how the Pharisee approaches Jesus. If she is our example, he is our warning. Jesus knows Simon's heart is hard, and he is going to confront him with this parable.

**[Luke 7:44-47] <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."**

This guy has a resume that would suggest good standing before the Lord. He's an Israelite, he's a religious professional and, as a Pharisee, he would know the Law back and forth and live in strict adherence to it. In his mind, he is a beacon of righteousness and, therefore, not at a deficit with God. He will show us that if we take our sin lightly it has significant implications for how we treat others and approach God.

We see it first with his opinion of the woman. He refers to her as a sinner, judges her, and seems to have little concern about her relationship God. When we believe our own hype, that we're more put together than others, we run the risk of seeing ourselves above them. I'm guilty of this occasionally. I like to think of myself as a very good driver. Not only do I know the rules of the

road, but I also know the protocol and courtesies of the road and do my very best to follow them. Unfortunately, 87% of the other drivers on the road don't, and I may, at times, take great exception with them. I have no patience for them. I get upset with them. And I think myself better than them. Thankfully, God often sends me a prophetess named Martha to remind me that my driving isn't as good as I think, and that God put me on the earth to pastor a church and not police the roads. Clarity on our brokenness gives us grace and mercy for others.

We also see his high view of himself impact his interaction with Jesus. Not only does he not even afford Jesus the social customs of the day but, more than that, he doesn't see him for who he really is. He calls him a prophet and teacher, both of which are true, but he can't see that the Messiah is in his house. His heart is hard and he is resistant to Jesus' efforts to make himself known to him.

This guy sees himself free of debt because he believes he's doing all the right things and because he's doing it better than others. Both are faulty thinking. Did you notice Luke only tells us the woman is a sinner? No details. Some have made the assumption it's sexual sin, and others have said this is Mary Magdalene. Both are pure speculation. I think he does that to help us avoid thinking that there are categories of sin more offensive to God and in need of greater forgiveness, that as long as we don't to "that", we're in better shape spiritually. But God's standard is not "better than others". God's standard is holiness, righteousness, perfection. **That means all of us are the woman.** We all fall under the category of "sinner". We all have a debt we can't pay.

This isn't a question of the amount of sin each has. Even the most, what we might call minor, sin drove the nails into Jesus' hands and feet. The point Jesus is making is our perception of our sin, how offensive it is to a holy God, and our understanding of our helplessness and hopelessness apart from him. We are all stuck in a cave and can't get ourselves out. The Pharisee did not get it. He thought little of his sin, and therefore thought little of the person offering forgiveness. The woman got it, and because of her grasp of what she'd been forgiven, she loved much. He had little grasp of what needed to be forgiven, so he loved little (the language may seem to suggest she was forgiven *because* she loved, but she loved much *because* she was forgiven much.)

How seriously do you take your sin? If you take it lightly, you take Jesus lightly. If you think you can make up for it by living a good life, you diminish the value of the cross. If your heart isn't full of love for Jesus and your life isn't full of worship of God, would you take some time to consider why? Perhaps confessing how far short you fall of his holiness is a place to start.

**[Luke 7:48-50] <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."**

How does Jesus approach these two who have approached him? For the Pharisee, as with most Pharisees, Jesus is confrontational. He makes clear his actions are out of line and he has a debt he cannot pay. But don't miss the incredible mercy given to him in an effort to help him grasp the magnitude of the forgiveness offered to him. If you're struggling, maybe it will help you too.

First, he is given more than words and parables. He gets to witness a woman completely captivated by Jesus. Perhaps, at some point, he said to himself “I don’t have what she has.” Your love and worship of the Lord is a testimony God uses to draw others to himself. He wants your faith to go viral, and your love of the Lord may be the chisel God uses to chip away at a hard heart. If we keep it a secret or allow ourselves to become numb to the glory of the Gospel, we withhold from others the very thing God wants to use to make himself known. But if we live it out, who knows what impact it may have. If you want to live out your faith more publicly, one of the best places to start is through baptism. It is a public declaration that says I’m with Jesus.

The Pharisee gets to hear Jesus say, “Your faith has saved you.” Now, we know we are saved by grace, through faith. Jesus isn’t presenting another Gospel. This woman’s faith is the acceptance of his saving grace. She hasn’t had to do anything to earn it. The message for the Pharisee is that what you’ve been doing doesn’t work. Forgiveness doesn’t come from perfect living and the blood of bulls and goats. It comes from accepting the gift of forgiveness in faith, knowing you can’t pay the debt on our own. If you trying to do for God in an effort to earn his grace and forgiveness, it won’t work. And it doesn’t have to. He’s done all that needs to be done, and he offers forgiveness to you as a gift. You simply must accept it in faith.

Jesus also makes clear who he is. When the others ask, “Who is this guy?”, they all know only God has the power and authority to forgive sin, and since Jesus is offering forgiveness, the implication is he’s more than a prophet or teacher. He’s God. The Pharisee will get that and have to make the choice we all have to make...do we believe Jesus is God?

For the woman, he takes her sin seriously. He doesn’t gloss over it. Doesn’t argue when she’s called a sinner. In fact, he admits her sins are many. **If you are struggling to take your sin seriously, be reminded that Jesus takes it seriously. If he didn’t, he wouldn’t have come.**

Jesus tells her she’s forgiven. The nameless woman known only as “sinner” has a new title: forgiven. Some of you need to hear that this morning. If you have put your faith in Christ and received his forgiveness, your name has been changed from sinner to forgiven. Rejoice in that!

Finally, he gave her something she likely lacked most of her life: peace. Whatever guilt and shame she carried around, whatever sense of worthlessness she struggled with, she was set free from it and is at peace with her God. It’s a peace we all can have, knowing our debt has been paid, we are forgiven, and we will be with him forever. The Apostle Paul says it this way:

**[Colossians 2:13-14] <sup>13</sup> And you, 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.**

We have been forgiven much, and at a great cost, one you and I could not pay. But Jesus did, willingly. May that immeasurable truth move your heart to abound with love for him.