

# "Fervent Love"



Luke 7:36-50

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**Luke 7:36** Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. 37 And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, 38 and

*stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil. 39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, "This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner." 40 And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." So he said, "Teacher, say it." 41 "There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 "And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?" 43 Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have rightly judged." 44 Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. 45 "You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. 46 "You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. 47 "Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little." 48 Then He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." 49 And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" 50 Then He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."*

This man Simon had invited Jesus to his house, but had failed to extend to him the "culture courtesies" of the day. Jesus would bring the issue up later with the man, but it was not because Jesus felt that He had been disrespected or slighted, nor did He cop the attitude that He was something to be revered through human acquiescence and fleshly adulation as if he was a rock star. He would however bring it up to expose the heart of this man Simon. A man that, *if he was to judged by his behavior*, would be guilty of wanting to hang out with important and influential people because it made *him* more important and influential. But it hardly seems that Simon was a potential convert seeking time with Jesus to clarify some ambiguous theological points! He was not the seeking Zacchaeus of Luke 19 nor was it the gathering of tax collectors and disreputable folks who gathered at Matthews house to eat in Matthew 9! This was something different kind of gathering. Even though it may have the outward appearance of the same activity, there was a heart difference. And the motivation makes all the difference!

However, despite knowing Simon's heart better than he knew it himself, Jesus went anyway! Jesus was always willing to eat with saint, sinner, and every perception in between! He ministered without regard to how he was treated or in what condition the hearts of those around him were in! He was going to do the work of God and kingdom without concern for notoriety or title. He was and *is* our perfect roll-model in a modern world where faith matters are strained by self pride and desire for position.

The woman which inexplicably joined this gathering however was a completely different story. For unlike the host, it was quite likely that not only was she a nobody in that society, but moreover as a prostitute, she was likely distained and rejected. And therefore the attitude of the approach of these two was vastly different. While the host failed to show any respect or honor, this woman poured out her very soul at the feet of Jesus! The man

was just going through the motions for self and position, but the woman seemed to grasp the magnitude of both her sin as well as the staggering presence of this man Jesus that was before her. She was surrendering both her heart *and her life* to Jesus. It's interesting that no one seems shocked that this woman is present at such an event; but rather the scandal was that she had drawn close to Jesus and he had let her do so! As long as she sat in the back and watched the game, everything was fine, but when she stepped onto the playing field, people became upset. Our attitudes so often are that we don't think a spectator should become a key player. But our fellowship is full of such stories!

The reasons behind each of our individual approaches to Christ today are many. Our motivations... our drive, our priorities can be both numerous and self deceiving. And because few of us live in practical and regular self review and personal critique, that kind of self awareness is rare. Most people just don't want to look in there. Not merely for fear of what they might find... but it's more about the *ramifications* of what they might find! The cost to adjust accordingly... the implied and expected responses... the 'counter actions' that would be expected of such discoveries. So the fact is, many, if not most of us, really have no idea what our true heart and motivations are for Christ until we are tested, and tested we shall be. This woman poured out this very costly perfume on Jesus, and she did so out of just fervent love. While we can act without love, we cannot love without action. For her, it was not just talk and religious motions. It was the giving of her all. It was the giving of all of herself and all that she held precious. *Real* love illicit extraordinary responses.

Most churched folks generally hold to the 'party line' and say that that they love Him. We use the preapproved vernacular and Christian ease to dialogue with others who share our faith community. But that inevitable day will come when we all show our true colors... why we are really here and where we hope it will all lead. Some survive it and many do not. When the Grace of God and the Cross of Christ is understood, the wave of emotion and brokenness can take us to our knees! The resulting surrender of one's life to the king is dramatic and all-encompassing. There is a wholesale burning of both our old life as well as all bridges back. All self-serving agendas are laid down and we live thereafter for king and kingdom... not merely out of obligation and debt, but out of understanding, thankfulness, and a clear belief that whatever road God had ordained for us is better than anything we could ever attain on our own. We take there-after the lifelong position of "bond-slave."

This man Simon... having witnessed this woman interact with Christ, proceeded to have a conversation in his head. You know what I'm talking about. We all do this. We have "conversations" with ourselves that we believe are with no one else but ourselves. Who knows if this man would have ever really verbalized out loud what he was thinking privately. Most of us wouldn't. But the man apparently didn't know what we know in theory but generally forget out of comfort. And that is that nothing is a secret with Christ. Nothing is private and nothing is ours alone. God knows every thought, and moreover every motive behind every thought... every motive behind every action. Psalms 139:4 tells us that "*Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all.*"

Jesus says concerning this woman: "*I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.*" Now most of us are ill prepared to embrace the full ramifications of this statement. Because while Jesus died to save us from our sins, *in their totality*, how many of us have only been forgiven a little? Not because we have only *sinned a little* but because we only put maybe half of them out on the table to be absolved? The fact is, many of us have only been forgiven a little because a little is all we have given to Him to be forgiven! And because we have only been forgiven a little, we still yet only *love a little*.

How is this done? By believing that a lot of that stuff we did and do is not that big of a deal...hardly worthy of an "act of forgiveness!" Certainly not worthy of the expense of crucifixion! Yet scripture teaches that all sin is rebellion and all rebellion separates us from a holy and perfect God. Thus *one sin* causes separation.

Salvation is only and ever spoke of in extremes and in totality. No one is "kind of" a Christian. No one is "mostly redeemed." Salvation is by definition a *surrender* of one's whole life. Not just the past, but our future. Not just all the stuff we messed up in the past, but every moment from there on out is His to direct. This woman's salvation that day was so whole and complete, that Jesus told her to "go in peace." And it is that "litmus test" that is the 'tell all.' Meaning our peace *or the lack thereof*, becomes both the barometer and our life GPS. It tells us if there is a problem with how we are living, and it tells us which way to go. Having been reborn, we now have the active presence of the Holy Spirit, trying at least, to guide us in His steps.

It is crucial therefore that we grasp very clearly what this peace is. It is not merely happiness, nor relief, nor ease, nor, *God help us*, the furthering of something we want! The biblical use of the term encompasses the idea of "harmony and agreement between parties." Meaning, peace is when we agree with God. While what peace *IS* can escape us at times, we all know what the *lack of peace* is! It is a troubled heart, a restless spirit, an unease, a foreboding heart. These things come because we are off course and out of His will.

Saul was under the belief that he was doing the right thing in his path against "the way." But along the way Jesus literally knocked him off his horse. It was 'on his face' that Jesus asks the question, "**Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?**" I have seen those operating out of stubborn pride say "well, if I am not on the right path, then God can knock me off my horse too!" Really? Is that they way you want to do this? Isn't that nothing more than daring God to stop you? That's not peace, that's not a relationship with God. That's not a dance, that's a fight! That's a rebellious child!

I can't help but notice that Jesus doesn't say to Saul, "Why are you persecuting my church?" He says, "**...why are you persecuting me?**" "Who are you?" "**I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.**" Jesus simply revealed Himself as the ultimate target for all sin and rebellion, and He revealed His will for Paul, *A.K.A. Saul*. And for Paul, that was enough. He received his marching orders and the rest is history. When you see clearly what your soul was designed for, you don't say, "No, thank you. I kind of like this over here instead. Can I have this?"

This broken woman came to Christ without demand nor presumption. She was broken and humbled in His presence. What the difference was between the two on stage that day was one had a fervent love for Christ and the other didn't. It wasn't the baggage that one had brought that day and the other who had been traveling light. For God washes away **all** sin...*if we let Him*, no matter whether you have been Laura Ingles Wilder or whether you have been Attila the Hun. With one sweep of the cross it is all gone no matter how high the mountain of sin! It was just that one of our players *knew* she was a sinner, and the other believed He was righteous, and that fact made all the difference when it came to their response to Christ, how they stood with Him, and how the rest of their lives would play out.

I remember how the whole story of the infamous *Jeffrey Dahmer* played out. Dahmer, also known as the *Milwaukee Cannibal*, was an American serial killer and sex offender, who committed the rape, murder, and dismemberment of seventeen men and boys between 1978 and 1991, with many of his later murders also involving necrophilia, cannibalism, and the permanent preservation of body parts—typically all or part of the skeletal structure. There is no doubt that the story of his life will turn your stomach. But in prison, before he was

murdered by another inmate, Dahmer had declared his faith in Christ saying he was now a born again Christian. He was baptized and discipled by a prison chaplain/pastor. We will never know for sure of Dahmer's faith until we get to the other side, but I have no problem believing that I might be living next to Jeffrey Dahmer for the rest of eternity! Because God can do it, and rest assured He does it all the time. There is no person who has ever lived that can 'out-sin' the cross of Christ. There is no person that has ever lived that God cannot forgive nor His blood will not wash!

*Curt Booth, a member of the Crescent Church of Christ in Oklahoma, about his role in Dahmer's conversion. "I know Jeffrey was ready," Booth told me. "Today, all the angels in heaven are rejoicing because Jeffrey has come home." Booth said he had no doubt about the sincerity of Dahmer's conversion. "On the great resurrection day, I'm expecting to see him right along there with Abraham, David, Isaac, James, John and all the saints that have lived right up to the modern day," Booth said. Booth usually ministered to inmates at prisons closer to home. But in April 1994, he caught a glimpse of Dahmer on television. **Dahmer mentioned that he wished he could "find a little peace," Booth said. The Oklahoma church member sensed what he considered the hurt in Dahmer's voice and eyes. Booth said he thought: "I know somebody who can give you that peace. His name is Jesus Christ."** Booth sent Dahmer a Bible correspondence course teaching the steps to salvation. Dahmer mailed the answers back and thanked Booth for the course. "But I still have one problem," Dahmer wrote. "This prison does not have a baptismal tank and Mr. Burkum the prison chaplain is not sure if he can find someone to bring a tank in and baptize me? I've taken all the other steps." Booth contacted Roy Ratcliff, minister of the Madison Church of Christ in Wisconsin. Ratcliff set up weekly Bible lessons with Dahmer and baptized him on May 10, 1994. Ratcliff later shared that Dahmer told him he had been fearful of the minister's visit. "He dreaded that I might say, 'No, you're too evil. You're too sinful. I can't baptize someone like you,'" Ratcliff said. Booth said he contacted other preachers besides Ratcliff, "but they were kind of scared to go in."*

*Booth himself served more than four years in a Kansas prison for what he called "thievery." Behind bars, he studied the Bible. However, he did not obey the Gospel until years later. After prison, he drank, abused drugs and ended up in a ditch after a drunken night hunting raccoons. When a doctor told him in 1987 that his life was almost over, he remembered all the promises he had made to God in prison and began to contemplate his eternal salvation. Booth called his nephew, a preacher named Phil Sanders, and asked what to do. Booth, his wife, Jenny, and three others studied with Sanders. All five were baptized in a pond behind Booth's house. "An amazing change took place in Curt," Sanders, a speaker for the "In Search of the Lord's Way" television ministry in Edmond, Okla., wrote in a tribute after his uncle's 2005 death. After his baptism, Booth led more than 1,000 inmates to Christ, including Dahmer. Upon hearing of Dahmer's conversion, David Hartman, a member of the Wilshire Church of Christ in Oklahoma City, wrote to congratulate him. Dahmer sent Hartman \$5 worth of stamps, asking him to mail him 25 copies of a Bible correspondence course for distribution to other inmates. (The Christian Chronicle, August 2010)*

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**Romans 12:9 -13** *Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.*