

Fastened by Forgiveness

Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. 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, 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. 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."

And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you."

So he said, "Teacher, say it."

"There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?"

Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more."

And He said to him, "You have rightly judged." 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. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. 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."

Then He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

Then He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace." (Luke 7:36 – 50)

The word the Holy Spirit chose with which to describe this woman means one "dedicated to sin or especially sinful". Yet when she approached Jesus, she "fastened" to Him. That's what the word "touching" really means in the verse. Now, this offended the Pharisee, Simon, because the whole premise of the Law of Moses is that sinful man cannot approach a Holy God let alone cling or fasten to Him. 'One must be clean and pure to come before God.' In their minds, the same would be true of a prophet, rabbi or anyone strongly adhering to the Levitical system.

But I can relate to this woman. I often wonder why in world God gave me a ministry of encouraging people to be spiritually or heavenly minded. I rejoice in it but just shake my head at the irony. And I am blessed just wonderfully by this story because in it Jesus directly fastens love to forgiveness. The way Jesus said it, her love led to his forgiveness; and

implied in the next part, "But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.", is the counter-point that His forgiveness also leads to love on our part. That is, it's a two way deal – His forgiveness → our love → His forgiveness → our love...

And to boot, this passage also shows that the degree of such love is directly related to the degree of forgiveness. Now, this is awesome because that explains to me why the people I know who clearly love God very dearly are the ones who have been faced with the reality of their own human frailty and sinfulness. And they have acknowledged it in sincerity.

You see, God can (and does) tell us we are sinful creatures, but unless we truly believe Him, we don't really see the need to accept His forgiveness. Obviously, this is fundamental to salvation but it is equally relevant to our lives as believers as well. At times, there may be an intellectual response or assent but we know that that is quite different from a sincere acknowledgement.

Frankly, the 'better' we do in keeping whatever moral code we personally believe in, the less we think we need His forgiveness and thus the less we find ourselves enraptured with love for Him. This is NOT a justification for immoral behavior by the way. For the love that is engendered by forgiveness leads us up the high road of repentance. "We don't need to go and sin more in order to be forgiven more, thus loving God more - all we must do is become more sensitive to our current state of sinfulness." (D Guzik)

Simon may have had fewer outward sins to forgive than the woman but the result was a coldness of heart. He did not even grant Jesus the customary courtesies of water to wash His feet or anointing oil. I've known people like that; maybe you have too.

"Good people". In fact, they are fastened to being good (notice I didn't say doing good) to the exclusion of faith, love and humility.

"Simon was a rude host. And in that culture hospitality was something that was treasured highly. When you invited guests to your home, they would leave their sandals at the door, but immediately there would be a servant there with a towel and with a basin of water, and the host would provide that servant to wash your feet in order that you might come into the house to dine. Of course, they wore open sandals; they had dirt pathways that they walked on, and it was just a common, accepted courtesy that the guests that were invited would have their feet washed by the servant when they entered the door of the house. And then it was customary to greet your friends with a kiss. Usually it was a kiss on each cheek. This was just common. And, in fact, in some of those areas it is still practiced today. Italy, the men in the church when they come up and greet you, kiss you on both cheeks. And it's a sort of a beautiful, loving thing. But it was common in that culture. And then also it was common to anoint with oil. To pour oil on the head of the guest. Which was a symbol of the joy that you'd hoped to share together that evening. And they would then serve you your first cup of coffee, no

sugar, strong Turkish type coffee, bitter. The idea being that you are washing away now all of the bitter experiences that you've had. The second cup they offer you is very sweet. Symbolic of that sweet time that we can now share together, that all of the bitterness was taken away." (Chuck Smith)

Now, this woman, whom in contrast we do not know by name, was washing His feet with her tears. I don't think it was intentional. You see, she had brought perfume to anoint Him, but finding Him willing to let her 'fasten' to Him if you would, she broke into tears at His acceptance. It must have just boggled her mind and heart for in that society and especially in that house she was virtually untouchable, religiously filthy. She probably wiped them off His feet with her hair in absolute humility perhaps concerned that she'd unintentionally gotten His feet wet. Her hair may have been cleaner than anything else she had at hand. Using her hair was a very intimate thing. She didn't come to wash His feet, but it happened that way because God wanted to expose her love. Are you willing to be exposed?

And she kissed His feet; kissed His dusty feet. What a humbling thing. Simon had not given Him water to wash which was customary in that culture where most people wore sandals. Jesus' feet were undoubtedly soiled.

Humiliation, indeed, is a 'dirty' experience, but on the other hand, it can lead to a clean heart. Unfortunately, we really know precious little of this in our prideful, self-oriented culture.

Of note is that this woman, the one who was 'especially sinful', had to enter the 'house of hypocrisy', Simon's house, in order to reach Jesus and display her affection. She probably could have found Him somewhere else, but she exposed herself in front of the very audience that would have condemned her. In doing this, she faced her accusers and her Lord at the same time, and often times so will we. As we approach our Holy God, say in prayer or worship, we can be sure that we'll recognize also the drivel and whine of the 'accuser of the saints', Satan. If we listen to his diatribes, we may back away.

But deep love beckons onward, into the intimate presence of the One who's feet have been dusty. The One who walked on earth will not turn you away. If you approach in love and faith, you may proceed. If you will allow the love He's planted in your heart to humble you, you'll be exposed. In that, you'll very possibly kindle rage from the religious but raves from your Redeemer.

And like this woman, it may be you'll have no 'name'. You may never be asked to speak at the next conference or huddle with the 'honchos'. But, you see, that's really the essence of this new life. It's your love and faith that identifies you with Jesus; it's a humbling love and that's your ticket, not your standing in the congregation or the ministry or the movement. When you're breathing the heavenly air of humble love, your life, your works, and your display are all unto Him and that's what matters.

The Christian culture of today, especially in the West has fostered

many 'Simons' if you would – people seeking a name for themselves and their ministries. Once humble ministers, lovers of God, have increasingly been convinced that they deserve more spotlight. As a consequence, they are embracing positions of ministerial power or celebrity more and people less.

David L. McKenna writes, *"Of all the traits that parents instill in their children by example, forgiveness is the most difficult. Early in my career... , a sophomore appeared before me as court of last resort to appeal his dismissal from school. Violation after violation of residence hall rules had exhausted the patience of directors, deans, and disciplinary committees. His hostility knew no bounds. Whatever awe may seem to pervade a president's office had no effect on him. Anger and hatred exposed a vicious rebellion against anyone in authority. As I listened to him vent his spleen, a contradiction posed itself in my mind. His father enjoyed the reputation as one of the most powerful and effective evangelists in the church. The inconsistency snagged my thoughts. When he had finished and waited for my response, I caught him completely off guard with the unofficial question, "Have you ever been forgiven?" A slap in the face would not have been more shocking. His eyes emptied of fire, his head dropped, and he choked out a barely audible, "No."*

"Would you like to be forgiven?" I asked. His answer taught me a lesson of a lifetime. Sobbing now, he lifted the lid that covered his resentment, "I have heard my father invite thousands of people to come

to Christ . . . but he has never asked me if I wanted to be forgiven."

When I was younger, I was focused on encouraging those to whom I ministered to invite Jesus into their heart. Surely, that's important, conceptually. But, the heart of the matter is the matter of the heart. We've often heard sermons that highlight the fact that the Laodicean church in Revelation chapter three has left Jesus outside. He says, *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."* (Rev 3:20)

But opening the door is just the step in the right direction. The question remains, what will you do when Jesus enters? You indeed may 'dine with Him', yet what kind of relationship will emerge? This is critical not just as a new born babe in Christ but throughout your Christian life. Having encountered Jesus, having invited Him into your 'home', what attitude will you embrace?

I submit that there is the human tendency to 'simonize' – to ask Jesus in to our home but to come to treat Him quite casually. The religious and the righteous are not necessarily one in the same. Oh, may God give us a fresh glimpse of how desperately we need Him and as a consequence, may our hearts be fastened to Him by forgiveness – our recognition of the need for it, our humble, trusting petition, and our honest acceptance.

Have you invited Him in? Dined with Him? Do you love Him? How much?