

Luke 7:39-50

Sermon: **Jesus' evangelistic approach**

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2024.



SIMON MEASURES JESUS

1. We continue with the same event, where a woman — a public sinner — entered the house of Simon the Pharisee and, through her actions, demonstrated her love for God's messenger who brought a message of grace, forgiveness, and salvation for everyone — not only for those who claimed to be God's people (the Pharisees).

1.1 (Luke 7:39) Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner."

1.2 From Simon's reaction, we can see that what was happening before his eyes didn't sit well with him. He says to himself what any Pharisee would think, given their beliefs and worldview: "If this man were a prophet..." What personally caught my attention here is this — Simon is convinced that he has the authority to define what a true prophet should look like when appearing among the people of Israel. He believes that a genuine prophet of God, in a situation like this, would reject a public sinner. In other words, a true prophet, according to Simon's view, would never associate with someone like this woman.

1.3 Why does Simon believe this way? I believe it's because Simon doesn't actually know what a true prophet of God looks like. He only believes that a prophet should conform to the image shaped by his movement and its doctrines. Tragically, the religious mindset of his movement has convinced him that he now has the right to judge whether Jesus is truly a prophet or not.

1.4 I find it fascinating how easily and quickly a human being can convince himself that he knows — and has the authority to determine — what is true and what is not. In this case, Simon is measuring Jesus.¹

¹ Luke 6:38

And even though the situation unfolding before him clearly calls him to question his own beliefs, he refuses to do so, because his mind has been washed by the religious dogma of his sect.

1.5 With that said, is Simon sincerely mistaken? And by that, I mean — is Simon a man with a good heart who simply holds wrong theological beliefs, or is he a self-righteous Pharisee who believes that the doctrines of his movement are the foundation of salvation for all who accept them? I don't know. I would like to believe that Simon belongs to the first category. After all, he is the only Pharisee who actually invited Jesus into his home.

JESUS RECOGNIZES THAT SIMON IS MEASURING HIM

2. All right, let's continue with the text.

2.1 (Luke 7:40–43) And Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he replied, "Say it, Teacher." "A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So 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 judged correctly."

2.2 We have a situation where Jesus responds to Simon's inner thoughts. That means Jesus knew exactly what Simon was thinking in his heart. How did Jesus know that? Was it because, as God, He could read a person's thoughts? Or was it because, as a man raised within the culture of Pharisaic teaching, He knew how a Pharisee would react in such a situation? Both possibilities could be true. While some teachers lean toward the first explanation, I tend to favor the second. Why? Because I believe Jesus came into the world primarily to teach humanity — as a man — the things it needed to know. And one of those things is this: how to discern the condition of another person's heart.

2.3 I believe Jesus could tell what Simon was thinking by observing his body language and facial expression. That's why He says to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you..." Jesus then tells the parable of the two debtors — a story meant to compare the condition of Simon's heart with that of the woman whom their culture labeled a public sinner.

THEY ARE BETTER CITIZENS, BUT NO LESS SINFUL BEFORE GOD THAN OTHERS

3. All right, let's continue. I'll now try to draw out the main idea that Jesus wanted to communicate to Simon — and to everyone else listening.

3.1 We see that one debtor owed his creditor a much larger amount than the other. From that, it's easy to conclude that the woman owed God far more because of her immoral actions, compared to Simon, who lived a more moral — and, conditionally speaking, better — life than she did. After all, she was a prostitute, while Simon was a religious man who strove to live a decent life.

3.2 And that's true. People who commit themselves to living by God's laws, who genuinely try to live rightly, are often better outwardly than those who reject such a way of life. But I don't believe that, through the story of the two debtors, Jesus wanted to emphasize that Simon's debt before God was

smaller than the woman's. I don't believe Jesus was saying, *"Simon, because you've lived a better life, your debt to God is less than that of this woman who lived as a prostitute."*

3.3 Because if that were what Jesus meant, it would imply that Simon's "good life" somehow contributed to his salvation. Yet we know that Jesus — and all His apostles — clearly teach that we are saved only by the grace of God, and that anyone who believes they can earn eternal life by their own merit is a fool.

3.4 So what is Jesus saying to Simon through this comparison? I believe Simon's own response to Jesus' question reveals the point. When Jesus asked, *"Which of them will love the creditor more, after both debts are forgiven?"*, Simon replied, *"The one who was forgiven more."* Let's pause on that phrase — forgiven more. Here's the question: if someone believes that their good life contributes to their salvation, why would such a person need forgiveness at all? They're already in good standing with God — or so they think. Wrong! The text shows us that the one who has been forgiven more is in a better position than the one forgiven less, and this is proven by the fruit of their love — the one forgiven more, loves more.

3.5 Because of this, I believe the story is not about who has sinned more or less in earthly terms. It's about the person who, in the deepest part of their being — through the journey of life — comes to recognize that they have nothing to offer God, and that they are utterly dependent on His mercy and forgiveness if they are to be right with Him.

3.6 The one who has the greater debt is the one who has the greater revelation within themselves — the realization that they are a sinner who has nothing to give God in exchange for righteousness. In other words, this isn't about repaying a debt to God; it's about forgiveness — about whether a person truly sees and accepts in their heart that they are a sinner who has nothing to offer except a sincerely repentant heart seeking His grace.

3.7 So yes, Simon answers Jesus' question correctly. He understands that the one forgiven more will love more. But does Simon understand that, when all is said and done, he is no different from this woman? Does Simon realize that his religious life cannot contribute the slightest bit to his salvation? Does he understand that, even though he has lived a more respectable life than this woman, he is — in God's eyes — just as much a sinner, equally in need of God's mercy to inherit eternal life? I'd say that, in this moment, as Jesus speaks to him, Simon still doesn't know that.

JESUS' EVANGELISTIC APPROACH

4. All right, let's move on to the next verses.

4.1 (Luke 7:44–47) And 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. You gave Me no kiss; but from the time I came in, she has not ceased to kiss My feet. You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven — for she loved much; but the one who is forgiven little, loves little."*

4.2 From these verses, we can conclude that Simon still doesn't understand God's plan of salvation, even though he may have walked for years — even his whole life — within the discipline of his religious movement, sincerely trying to live a better, more moral life than most of his fellow citizens. And why do I believe that? Because we see that Jesus, through this conversation, is trying to teach Simon the wisdom He brought into the world as light.

4.3 When I look deeper into the passage, I realize that Jesus' evangelistic approach here is absolutely brilliant. He first leads Simon, through a simple story, to a logical conclusion. Then, through that same story, He draws a direct comparison between Simon and the woman who entered his house uninvited. His goal, I believe, is to provoke Simon — positively — to reconsider his beliefs.

4.4 Jesus tells him: *"She has washed My feet with her tears — you did not. She has kissed My feet — you did not kiss Me. She has anointed My feet with costly perfume — you did not anoint My head with oil when I entered your house."*

4.5 The first thing I want to emphasize is this: when we read these verses, we might easily think Jesus is rebuking Simon — that He's angry because Simon didn't treat Him the same way the woman did. Personally, I don't believe that's the case. I don't think Jesus is criticizing Simon for the way he received Him. As I mentioned earlier, Jesus' goal was to teach Simon about God's salvation — and that's exactly what He's doing here.

4.6 What Jesus is really saying is something like this: *"My dear Simon, by the way you welcomed Me, you've shown Me that I don't hold the same importance to you as I do to this woman. She heard My teaching — My Sermon on the Mount — and that teaching has taken deep root in her heart. She understands God's plan of salvation. Through her actions — her fruit — toward the messenger of God's grace, she shows Me that God has forgiven her. You, on the other hand, through your actions, show Me that I am not truly important to you — that I'm just another guest at your table. And that can only mean one thing: My message of salvation hasn't yet taken root in your heart. But now I invite you to repent and to understand that you are just like this woman — in need of God's forgiveness and mercy, because your debt before Yahweh is far too great for you to repay. Only a repentant heart qualifies you to be right with God. Repent, Simon, and seek forgiveness — and you will receive it. Do not be the one forgiven little, who loves little — for his sins remain unforgiven."*

4.7 Because of all this, I believe Jesus' intention here was not to reject Simon — but to invite him.

WHAT DO THE WORDS "YOUR FAITH HAS SAVED YOU" MEAN?

5. All right, let's continue.

5.1 (Luke 7:48–50) Then He said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven." Those who were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?" And He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

5.2 We read that Jesus told the woman, in front of everyone, that her sins were forgiven. If you remember, in the event where Jesus healed the paralytic, He also said that his sins were forgiven. I

mentioned then that Jesus has the authority to recognize to whom God has granted forgiveness and to whom He has not.²

5.3 As an example, I used the apostle Peter, who rebuked Simon the sorcerer and told him that his heart was not right before God. Because of that spiritual discernment, Peter also had the authority to recognize whose sins were forgiven by God and whose were not.

5.4 With that said, I believe Jesus could not, of Himself, forgive anyone's sins. Rather, because of the divine teaching He brought into the world, He had unique insight into God's plan of salvation — and therefore, the authority to recognize to whom His Father had granted forgiveness. In this case, He sees the woman's fruit — the outward expression of her heart — and He recognizes her deep repentance. Because of that, He concludes that God has forgiven her.

5.5 Furthermore, notice that in verse 50 Jesus does not say, *"I have saved you; I have forgiven your sins."* No — He says, *"Your faith has saved you."*

5.6 If we want to understand what Jesus truly meant by this statement, we must approach it from a biblical perspective. His words here cannot be interpreted superficially or literally.

5.7 If we take His statement without the wisdom Scripture gives us, we might easily conclude that we save ourselves — that faith originates from within us, as if we could somehow produce it on our own.

5.8 But that's not what Jesus meant. He did not mean that we decide to have faith by our own strength. The source of faith is not within us — the source of faith is God the Father. Jesus understood this perfectly; that's why He said in His Sermon on the Mount, *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, the meek, those who hunger for righteousness,"* and so on. The key word there is blessed. Jesus knew that faith originates from His Father. So when He says to the woman, *"Your faith has saved you,"* what He is really saying is this: *"You have received the gift of faith from God the Father. This faith — now yours — has been given to you through His forgiveness. You are blessed; you are chosen! Out of your free will, with a repentant heart, you came before Me and showed love. Your faith has saved you — it is the gift of God that you have now received."*

5.9 I believe the woman understood exactly what Jesus meant. As I said earlier, she likely heard His Sermon on the Mount. For the first time in her life, she had heard a message of reconciliation with God — one so simple, yet so magnificent and powerful.

THE SOURCE OF OUR LIVES IS GOD

6. There are passages in Scripture that tell us God prepared good works for our lives before this reality even existed. What do I mean by that? We must always be aware that every second of our existence is intimately woven into the divine script God has written for each of us.³

² In sermon number 29, §1.–1.8, you can find a more detailed explanation of the idea behind the words "your sins are forgiven."

³ Ephesians 2:10; Psalm 139:16; Jeremiah 29:11; Romans 8:28–29

6.1 From putting on our socks in the morning to deciding to do something kind for someone later in the day — everything, even the good works we do (prayer, forgiveness, helping those in need, choosing to live righteously, or giving to the poor) — all of it ultimately comes from God. Everything we are and everything we can do is possible only because He made it so. If we carry that perspective in daily life, we won't become proud and say things like, *"I did that. I'm the good one. I made myself successful, and I give because I want to. I chose to live better than my neighbor. I am a good person. I deserve God's favor."*

6.2 No — instead, we will say, *"Thank You, God, for showing me every day through my good works that I am blessed, that I am saved by Your grace. To You alone belongs all the glory — not to me."*

6.3 Let me give a simple example. The other day, my sister went to the beach. Sitting near her was a woman who, a few days earlier, had asked her to help rescue a little bee that was in trouble. That same woman later decided to give a ball to a child who came to the beach with his grandmother. The grandmother thanked her for the gift, but the woman replied, *"You don't need to thank me. Thank God — He gave the ball to your grandson."*

6.4 Although that's a simple example, I believe we all need to practice such seemingly small acts in our daily lives. That woman, through her action, demonstrated who deserves the glory. She understood that everything she has and everything she is comes as a gift from God. The moment she decided to give that ball to the child, she thanked God — because His divine plan for her life made that act possible. And she showed that awareness through her fruit.

6.5 In closing, although I haven't been a Christian for long, I know well that the universal message of the Church is this: the cross, and what Jesus accomplished on the cross, is the foundation of salvation for everyone who believes. And that is true. But in this event — where Jesus tells the woman that her sins are forgiven and that her faith has saved her — He has not yet gone to the cross. Meaning, she doesn't know about what Jesus will later do for His people and for the rest of humanity. And yet — she is saved. Jesus Himself says she is. What does that tell us? It gives me hope. Many times I've asked myself — and even theological teachers — *"What about those who never heard the message of the cross?"*

6.6 I've received all kinds of answers — and I've believed all kinds of theories. But after reading this event and many others where Jesus teaches His people about truth — about who God really is and what He asks of us — and realizing that it is ultimately God the Father who forgives and saves, I find myself thinking: perhaps there is hope for those who never had the chance to hear the message of the cross. Perhaps there is hope for those who lack the theological understanding that others might have. Perhaps one doesn't need to know the complete picture to be a child of God.

6.7 Maybe this woman is our example for believing that. Though she was born into Jewish culture, her theological knowledge was surely limited — yet the message of salvation, in which Jesus said, *"Only a repentant heart qualifies for the kingdom of God,"* was enough for her to understand the very essence — who God is and what He requires from human beings.

6.8 In other words, maybe there are people who, throughout their lives, have grasped the essence of the message of salvation — even if they never had the opportunity to learn about the cross and its

power. Personally, I believe such people have existed and still exist today — and all of them will one day see the face of Jesus when He raises them at His second coming.

6.9 On the other hand, my dear readers, you will each have to decide for yourselves whether what I've said makes sense — or whether you will reject it entirely.