

How to become more loving

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[0:00] So I'm going to, I'll read it for us and then I'll pray and then we'll think about this passage together. So Luke 7, make sure we've all got it there, starting at verse 36.

When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house.

So she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. As she stood before him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears.

Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is, that she is a sinner.

Jesus answered him, Simon, I have something to tell you. Tell me teacher, he said. Two people owed money to a certain money lender.

[1:14] One owed him 500 denarii and the other 50. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now, which of them will love him more?

Simon replied, I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven. You have judged correctly, Jesus said. Then he turned towards the woman and said to Simon, Do you see this woman?

I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.

You did not give me a kiss, But this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.

Therefore I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven, as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little, loves little.

[2:26] Then Jesus said to her, Your sins are forgiven. The other guests began to say among themselves, Who is this who even forgives sins?

Jesus said to the woman, Your faith has saved you. Go in peace. This is God's word. Amen. Let me pray. Almighty God, we thank you for your word, the Bible, and this is how you speak to us.

This is the way that you've ordained, to speak to your people. And so we ask now, that as your people, that you would give us ears to listen, and eyes to see. That we might be moulded and shaped by the word of God.

That you would help us to know more of ourselves, and know more of you. We ask for this in the name of Christ. Amen. Amen. Now, a few years ago, it's quite a while back now actually, my sister, she used to live in Cyprus.

She lived there for about 10 years, and as you imagine, 10 years, a nice part of the world. From time to time, we would go and visit her. There was one time we went, and we went in kind of February time, you know, you think February, it's kind of nice cold here, nice to get away in the middle of the winter, to get some sunshine.

[3:51] And you know, it's going to be kind of a bit hotter than it is here. Don't get me wrong, it's nice to get away. I think we actually left when it was snowing, and we landed in nice hot weather.

But one thing, if you ever get there, if you ever go away, which I didn't expect, is you've got to be careful with the swimming pools. Because what happens is, you know, you go to a hot place, and they look inviting, the sun's out, but you jump into a swimming pool in February, even in Cyprus, you only do it once.

Because it is freezing. And I mean like, proper take your breath away cold. It looks warm, it looks ideal, but you turn any length, you spend any length, you turn blue, just like you would, if you jumped in one here.

Now, it's a humorous story. But the point is, that I want to make here is, that there are lots of things in life, when things are not what they seem. There's lots of realities like that.

Take a simple story about going away. There's lots of things in life, where things are not what they seem. There are lots of people, who are not what they seem.

[5:03] you know, I was deceived by the temperature, out in the air temperature. But there are lots of people, who might want to make out, that they're different, than what they are underneath.

And in our reading this morning, it's kind of exactly what we see, with this guy Simon the Pharisee. He is not what he seems. He gives off the appearance, of being warm and inviting.

But in reality, his heart is cold as ice. Now, the first kind of illustration I've used, it kind of seems that, when you talk about things, not what they seem, it's kind of, I've pitched it, as almost that's a negative.

But, one of the places I would love to go, which is, you might think is, you know, totally the opposite to Cyprus, somewhere I've never been, is I've never travelled, to Iceland.

But there, you have, when it comes to swimming, you have the opposite experience. It's surrounded by snow, it looks freezing, and then right in the middle, what do you see?

[6:12] Those kind of pools of water, filled with people. It's kind of, filled, like heated by a geyser, geothermal water, where people are getting, it's surrounded by snow. It looks cold, but it's surprisingly warm.

Everybody wants, everybody's in there, having a good time. You can see the steam, coming off. It's what we see, with the other character. This nameless woman, who couldn't be any more different, than Simon.

Her appearance, when we meet her, what she has to offer, it looks like someone, that you'd be told, to keep your distance from.

It looks like she, you know, you can imagine, stay away from her. Yet, here what we see, that her heart, is surprisingly warm.

Things are not always, what they seem, both positive, and negative. And in this passage, Jesus brings both their hearts, the cold, and the warm, to the open.

[7:15] He brings them both, he exposes them both, for good or for ill. As we reflect, as we reflect, on this, it does something.

Because, as we reflect on their hearts, it exposes, what happens is, it actually exposes, our hearts too. Because it, it forces us, to ask the question, as we compare, these two characters, it forces us, to ask the question, well what is my heart, really like?

Do I even know, my own heart? Am I, am I deceived, of myself? Am I more like, Simon, or this nameless, woman?

However, however you answer, that question, I want to encourage you, with this, this is what I want us, where I want us to get to, this morning.

I want to encourage you, with this, that every single one of us, sat here this morning, have the opportunity, to respond to Jesus, like the woman does. Every single one of us, you can respond to Jesus, like this woman does, to love him, with a warm heart, with a warm heart, that has been changed, by him.

[8:30] You can do that. And before we get there, I want us to, just, we're going to tease out, what's going on here. But before we look, and we're going to, zoom in on these two, on Simon and the woman, a bit later, before we zoom in on them, I really just want to, set the scene, and outline the principle, that's at play, across the whole passage.

And it kind of flows, further down in the passage, it kind of flows, everything flows, out of kind of, verse 47. Look with me towards the, the end of the passage, verse 47, the end of the verse, you see what he says to Simon, he says this, he says, but whoever has been forgiven little, loves little. Whoever's been forgiven little, loves little. There is many implications, from that verse. But, I want to flip it, because I want to flip it, to understand, actually, there's, in the same way, that we look at Simon, and the woman, there's a way to look at that verse, in a positive light, because, if whoever has been forgiven little, loves little, do you know what else it means?

It means, whoever has been forgiven much, loves much. This verse, is the key to understanding, the whole scene, that the love, anyone has for Jesus, is directly related, to the amount of love, and forgiveness, they've received from him.

The more forgiveness, and love, someone has received, the more love, they have for him. Jesus tells a parable, to make sure Simon, gets it.

[10:05] See what he tells, parable, it's in verse 41. Look with me. Two people owed money, to a certain money lender. One owed him 500 denarii, and the other 50.

Neither of them had the money, to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them, will love him more? Just to give you, a kind of, economic scale, 500 denarii, 300 denarii, would be like, a year's wages.

So 500, it's kind of like, a year and a half's wages. So you're talking, what like, average wage, now, you're talking like, 50k. Okay, that's 500 denarii. So you can kind of, work it out, how much money that is.

Which of them, are loving more? Simon answers, right on cue, verse 44, I think it is, verse 43, sorry. I suppose the one, who had the bigger debt, forgiven, the one that had the bigger debt, paid off.

The person with the bigger debt, the one who owes more, has a greater love, for the money lender, who cancels the debt. And we get that, right? I mean, it's kind of an obvious principle, that is how people react.

[11:16] You forget, forget debt or bankruptcy, which is kind of implied here, because they both can't pay. Forget that for a minute. Let's just think of an everyday example. If you go out, and someone buys you a coffee, you say, oh thanks, you didn't have to do that, let me get the next one.

You appreciate it, but then the thanks, and the gesture you drink, you kind of move on. You don't spend ages like, oh I'm just amazed, somebody bought me a coffee. You know, you're really thankful, but it kind of moves on from that.

Contrast that with, someone bought you a house. You know, you're like, what, you bought me a house? You'd be overwhelmed, because most of us, wouldn't be able to pay, that amount of money back.

You'd, what would you do? You'd be like, well, I'd need to do some kind of, huge act of kindness, to show my appreciation. You'd probably even struggle with that. How can I, I can't accept a house? I mean, the illustrious, it's obvious, it's the same with here. 50K, 50 grand, is the kind of, you know, contrasted. The point of it, this is the point of the story, it's right here.

[12:25] The woman and Simon, both, both people in the parable, are bankrupt. It doesn't matter whether it's 50, or 500, they're both in the same, same state. They both have nothing left.

The woman, this is what, this is what he's, what he's saying to them. He's saying, the woman and Simon, they're both spiritually bankrupt. It's just that, on the surface, the woman's sin is plain, for everyone to see.

It's there in your face, when it says she's a sinful woman, there is a, kind of, at least the suggestion here, that she, you know, that she's been selling her body.

She knows, from the choices that she's made, how bankrupt spiritually she is. That's why she's weeping at his feet. Deep love for Jesus, flows from a deep awareness, of her sin, of our sin.

The depth of gratitude, of her affection and gratitude, it's directly tied, to how aware she is, of her spiritual bankruptcy, of how much of a mess she made.

[13:38] She knows her actions, have come from an icy cold heart. But she also has, the lived experience, of meeting the one, who melted it.

It's a principle at play. Let's look at Simon then. Simon is kind of, the one with more of the problems really. Simon on the hand, has very different motives, of being with Jesus, than the woman does.

Think about, at this point in Jesus' life, Jesus' status, in Jerusalem, in Israel, was on the rise, that's why he got an invite, in the first place. His stock is rising, and so it's made sense, for Simon to be seen, with the new and up and coming man, about town, invite him round.

But this is where, Simon's heart is first displayed. You see, in Jewish hospitality, the way honour was shown to guests, was, it's kind of, you know, different to now.

It was seen by, this is, it was normal, normal hospitality was this, that when a guest arrived, they would have their feet washed, they'd get a, you know, a kiss on the cheek, and then they'd have, their head anointed with oil.

[14:53] There's basic etiquette in the day, there's basic, to do that. It'd be like, you know, today, if we were to think of what it was like, it'd be like, inviting someone into your house, and making yourself a drink, and not offering your guest one.

That's, that's what it'd be like. Or, you know, hang up your own coat. It's just not what you do, is it? You, you know, you've got guests around, you say, what can I get you to drink? And, you kind of look after them.

Simon doesn't do, the basic Jewish etiquette, for Jesus. Because, he didn't really want him there. He invited him along, for his own sake.

When this nameless woman, arrives, uninvited, it's her love for Jesus, that becomes a massive problem, for Simon. You know, he can't fathom out what's going on. He's watching this whole scene, play out before his eyes, in his house.

And, it's not the woman that shocks Jesus. It's not the woman that shocks Simon, it's Jesus that shocks him. Because, Jesus treats the woman, in a way that, in the rest of society, would be totally unacceptable.

[16:04] You know, what are you, he's expecting Jesus, to say, you know, oh yeah, she's, like, get out of town. He can't come in here. But no. It not only shocks Simon, it shocks his guests as well.

And, you know, what we see is, ultimately, Simon fears that this man, now, with his actions, and this woman, will damage, will damage, instead of, enhance his reputation.

You can imagine, maybe, imagine what's going through, Simon's mind. if this man acts like this, in my house, what will everybody think of me? Letting this woman, wash his feet, in the middle of my room.

How dare he? See what he says, he thinks to himself, if this man were a prophet, he would know, he's touching in, and what kind of woman she is. She's a sinner.

Yeah. Simon's called her. is brought right onto the open. But it's not as subtle, as he thinks.

[17:08] It is a superficial warmth, with the goal of Simon, getting a higher status, because of, because of Jesus, that Jesus is, everybody's talking about.

But, the strange thing is, Simon doesn't see it. He's blind. How Simon treats this woman, and Jesus, he doesn't think, there's anything wrong.

For Simon, his reputation, is more important, than anything else. If he's right, in the eyes of the crowds, if the majority thinks, he's a good man, a moral man, an upright man, that is all that Simon wants.

All these people, can't be wrong about me, can they? And obviously, God, must agree. You see, Simon uses reputation, and approval, as a means of covering, up his mess.

And he doesn't have a clue. He doesn't have a clue. It's because, he doesn't have a clue, that he doesn't know, he needs forgiving.

[18:13] He doesn't want, Jesus' love for him, because he doesn't think, he needs it. And because he doesn't think, he needs it, his love for Jesus, isn't there.

Throughout history, people have tried, to use Jesus politically. So we see, kind of this in a way. We see that, in our world today, when Jesus' name, is kind of making noises, all of a sudden, leaders want a piece of him.

And we could, you know, you could delve into that, and make a lot of that, if you wanted. But that's not really the point, it's not really the point, to have a go at Simon. Because what you see, is actually, there is a little bit of Simon, in all of us.

The amount of, the lack of love, comes to the surface, when our reputation, is at stake. And we can trick ourselves.

We can trick ourselves, because desire, for reputation, can quite easily, become a game. You know, whichever, whoever we're with, it's easy to play, up to whichever crowd, we're hanging out with.

[19:29] You know, even in church, we can do it. Even in church, it's easy to play, the reputation game, church edition. You know, it kind of, looks like this, you know, and these are all good things, don't want to hear me wrongly, these are good things, that we want to do.

But I'm just talking about, the motivation, you know, we come every Sunday, serve, get involved, like to be in, important decisions. We might even talk to you, talk about Jesus, pray with each other. And, I don't want to hear you wrongly, those are all good.

We want to be like that in church, we want to be thought well of, by people in church. We want to, so, we want to do all of those things. But here's where, here's where we realise, where we might be playing, reputation game, church edition.

Because, outside of the church, when we become fearful of acting the same way, as we do inside the church. Are we the same?

Do we act the same outside? Do we talk about the Bible, pray, let it be known, how involved we are on Sundays? Or, or do we fear, what that might mean, for what people think about us? How it might damage our reputation?

[20 : 44] That is, challenging, and it is, piercing. Because it exposes hearts, and our love, it is laid bare, and it feels uncomfortable, because we all, including myself, see, that our love for Jesus, is sometimes not what we think it is.

Sometimes our hearts, are colder than we know. Why the purpose in bringing this up?

Got to ask that question. Why does Jesus bring this up with Simon? What's his purpose? Why does he bring it up? We have to get to this, because, actually, if we think of why Jesus is challenging Simon, it changes everything.

Jesus steps in with Simon, and he actually steps with us right now, but the reason is, he's not stepping in to have a go at him, and he's not stepping in to have a go at us. Jesus highlights what's going on in Simon's heart, and he highlights right now, what might be going on in our hearts, so that we will, like the woman, realise our own bankruptcy, and that we, like the woman, will fall at the feet of Jesus, that we will, like the woman, let Jesus melt our icy hearts, and have our sins covered up, covered over.

That's what redemption is. That's what salvation is. It's having an unpayable debt, paid for with grace. The woman knows it.

[22 : 19] Her love for Jesus is the sign, it's the point that she has received his love. Verse 48, he says to her, your sins are forgiven. The debt, the unpayable payment, the price, the cost of her emptiness, her bankruptcy, her previous life, Jesus has paid for with his life.

She is given complete forgiveness, a new life, free from the old ways she knew before. He takes her massive debt, he takes her life of promiscuity, he takes her icy cold heart, and in exchange, he gives her his perfect record.

Just for a moment, just for a moment, imagine what this means for that woman. Because her life was a life of being shunned, disregarded, looked down on by a whole community, because of her life choices, no one had anything to do with her.

Jesus restores and accepts her when no one else would. He would be rejected so that she could be accepted by the living God, by the one whose only opinion of you is the only one that actually matters.

You know, the truth is, Jesus has every right to be frosty and cold to any of us, but the kingdom of God is not tit for tat. We have naturally cold hearts, but Jesus invites us.

[23 : 53] Jesus invites us. He's not like Simon. He doesn't invite us to be a part of his, like, host of this kind of special party that's going on.

He doesn't invite us to boost his own esteem in self-confidence and reputation. No, he invites us, and his invite is full of warmth and grace and kindness.

He doesn't invite us to enhance his own reputation or elevate his status, but he invites us out of sheer love. He invites us who have nothing to give.

This whole scene is there to build up Simon. Jesus invites us who have nothing to give.

And the woman has already accepted Jesus' invite. That same offer is to each of us. Jesus promises to pay the debt we cannot afford and to give us his perfect record.

[24 : 55] Complete, total, absolute forgiveness in new life, free from the old, we knew before. And it is a free gift. Jesus specializes. It's his speciality in paying off massive debts.

That is his speciality. I started off by saying that every single one of us has an opportunity here to respond to Jesus like the woman does.

And you might be thinking, well, I mean, come on, isn't she a bit over the top? Isn't it a bit OTT? Is she not, you know, that's what everyone else would have thought at the time.

You know, she breaks the alabaster jar. That in itself, we mentioned kind of money conversions.

That jar of, I think it's in Mark's gospel, it's explained as pure nard.

That would have been a year's wages. That jar is the most treasured single, you know, it's kind of 30,000 pound there, right there in that jar.

[25 : 56] Is she a bit over the top? Everyone else would have thought she doesn't care. She doesn't care. You can picture it. She's caught wind that Jesus in town uses spread where he's

eating and she makes a beeline for him.

And, you know, perfume like that, it's not like a perfume today. It doesn't have a pump action spray. It was a once only used bottle. Once she broke it, that was it, gone.

Often people never opened it. They would just use it to be kept and traded. She breaks the jar and the whole bottle is then poured over his feet.

The most treasured thing she owns, she gives up because Jesus is a bigger treasure. She treasures Jesus more than anything else in the world that she owns.

She doesn't just kiss him once on the cheek. She's so overwhelmed, she kisses his feet continuously, cleansing his dirty, dusty, tired feet with her tears.

[26:58] It is so emotional here. She unbinds her hair, which in the first century was scandalous. It was akin to almost undressing. She is so captivated with him, she abandons her dignity to honour him.

And of course, he would lose, Jesus would lose all his dignity when he would die the death of a slave for her.

Her tears, her treasure, her dignity poured out. It is radical, over-the-top love. You think, couldn't she have been more discreet about it? Why so brazen?

She doesn't care. And Jesus loves her for it. And the challenge is, do we love Jesus as much as this woman? And if we don't, and like, when I read this, I'm going to be honest, I'm like, I don't think I love Jesus as much as this woman.

And is it because, for myself, and for us, we don't realise the extent of our sin as much as she does, and we'd forget, and we haven't understood properly the extent of how much we're forgiven?

[28:19] Because the reality is, you can never love Jesus too much. There is no act, there is no amount of love that is over the top that is too radical. Because he's the king of kings, whose love for you is higher than the heavens, deeper than the oceans.

It took him to die for you. What would it look like? What would it look like in my life, in your life, to love Jesus with an over the top radical love like her?

Now, I don't know what that looks like for each of us. And we're all different personalities, some of us are more reserved by nature. So, you know, loving him with an over the top radical love, it doesn't mean that like, this is the only way you can do it.

Like, big public extravagance, like, you know, it doesn't mean that. If, if you want to love Jesus with an over the top radical love, the starting place is not actually where you think.

What we, what it, where it doesn't come from is whipping ourselves up into some spiritual frenzy and beating ourselves up because we're not like her or not like the other person or thinking, try harder, must try harder to love Jesus.

[29:31] It doesn't come from that place. It starts in the strangest of places. The strangest of places it starts where this woman starts, it starts where Jesus wants Simon to get to, it starts with understanding how much of a mess we are.

It's the strangest of places to start, isn't it? It starts with acknowledging and admitting that you don't love him as much. Isn't that the weirdest thing? That's the place it starts.

You wouldn't think it started there. It starts with saying, I don't love Jesus as much as I should. I'm sorry for not loving you as much as I should.

The place to love is by acknowledging that you don't. The principle we started with holds true for our lives. Whoever has been forgiven much loves much.

The more we're aware, this is why, this is, this is kind of why all works by acknowledging that we don't love, the more we're aware of our mess, the more aware of our sin, our lostness, the more we understand how forgiven we are, the more we will love him.

[30:35] And so, only from that starting place will we really love Jesus with an over-the-top radical love by acknowledging that we're inadequate in terms of how much we love.

What might that look like in your life with the time, treasures and talents God has given you? What could each of you, what could each of us do for Jesus? What radical over-the-top adventure is he calling you to?

Is it over-the-top financial generosity? Is it starting a prayer group at work? Is it being open about your faith with your neighbours? Is it living outside the church the same way you do inside?

Because your reputation outside doesn't matter. the only reputation that matters is the reputation and acceptance of Jesus Christ.

Radical over-the-top love for him begins with understanding Jesus' radical over-the-top love for you. But it's not try harder.

[31:44] Here's where we're going to sort of come in for landing. here's the beauty of it all. You see, the beauty of it all is that at the cross you become united to Jesus and in union with Jesus because it's not try harder he gives you his perfection.

He doesn't just give you the moral standing he gives you the spirit of God which enables you to do something that you didn't think was possible. Isn't that beautiful? You look at this you think I can't do that.

It's okay. It's okay that you can't do it because you don't have to strive to do it yourself. The spirit of God enables you to do the loving thing that you think is too much. So if you want to do something for Jesus you just go I'd love to do this thing but I can't.

Help me, empower me by the spirit of God give me what I need so that I can do the thing that at the moment feels out of my grasp and then you will be able to love Jesus in a way that you never thought was possible.

And so once more with that in our heads once more I want to ask that question. What would it look for in our lives to love Jesus with an over the top radical love like this woman?

[33:01] Jesus will empower you to live that out. You won't do it yourself. Jesus will empower you to live that out. Instead of caring what people thought this woman made a beeline for him with extravagant over the top love and we get to love Jesus like that too.

If we've grown whole he can heat you up. He can make you boil and bubble with gospel life. And if you're here this morning and you're still thinking it through what it means to follow him, this life of risk taking gospel purpose and adventure is on offer.

It's on offer. The life of being forgiven and knowing his love for you is on offer to anyone who would put their trust in him. And Jesus promised us to love you like no one else will.

With a love that takes icy cold hearts and makes them boil and bubble over for him. Let me pray.

Almighty God, Lord Jesus, I just thank you for your radical love for me and for us.

That you lost everything, everything, every bit of dignity you gave up. love. With a love that no one has ever, the biggest demonstration of love for anyone that has ever been seen, you've done for us.

[34:33] And so I praise you. And I pray that you'd show us more of ourselves. I pray that you'd show us and I pray that you'd teach us about what it means to know your love.

And I pray that you'd equip us and empower us by the power of the Holy Spirit to love you in the same way and to maybe do those things that the world would say we're crazy for doing. And so I pray that you'd equip us to love you radically.

We acknowledge and we confess that as I look here, I don't have a love like this woman does, but I know that you could give me that and I know that you could give us that by the power of the Spirit working in us.

Give us a love for you that we didn't think was possible. Equip us to go on that gospel adventure with you. And so we thank you that this is all because of you Lord, that you've forgiven us of every single sin, every single mess has gone because of your blood.

So bless us and equip us to live that out. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.