

“You are Committed to Christ because of Love”

Today marks the end of our stewardship emphasis, *Christ’s Love, Our Calling*. Once a month for the past seven months we’ve looked at the love Christ has for us, which compels us to show that love in our life. This past year we’ve looked specifically at how we show that love by the way we use the gift of time God has blessed us with. Today, gospel writer Luke will teach us why we as Christians will faithfully commit our time to Christ.

Our story is from Luke’s gospel... this story is different from the story found in Matthew, Mark and John. In that story Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, is the one anointing Jesus’ feet at a banquet given in Bethany. This took place one week before his ride into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

Unlike that banquet, which was given in Jesus’ honor, our story in Luke takes place at the home of a Pharisee named Simon. Simon’s reason for the invitation to Jesus is not given, but from the omission of common courtesies, it appears he wanted to put Jesus under scrutiny. It was common courtesy to offer water for washing the dust off of sandaled feet. Simon didn’t do that. As in many lands today the kiss is a sign of friendship and welcome, similar to a handshake. Simon didn’t even do that. The oil that Jesus referred to was not the expensive perfume the woman used, but ordinary oil that when poured on the head would refresh the traveler. Simon didn’t do that either.

As you paint the scene of this story in your mind, add the word “reclined.” The usual position at the table was reclining on a couch with head toward the table. This position would make the approach of the woman to Jesus’ feet possible without being noticed, as we read the next verse...

The Greek word order Luke uses literally says, “Behold a woman!” This indicates her presence was a surprise. Adding to the surprise Luke says that she was “a sinner” – a word that meant “open sinner,” one with a shady past and questionable reputation. There is no proof that this was Mary Magdalene as some people claim. Nor can we say that she was a prostitute since nothing is said about what had tainted her reputation.

“She brought an alabaster jar of perfume.” Alabaster was a semi-transparent stone, yellow or cream colored, named after the town in Egypt where it was found. This stone could be carved into shapes with a top that would be broken off when its contents were to be used. The perfume was very costly. In the opinion of this woman, nothing was too good or too expensive for Jesus.

38and as she stood behind 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.

Luke doesn’t tell us why she was weeping. Does she come to lay her repentant soul at the Savior’s feet? Or is it tears of gratitude from someone who had learned about his forgiving love? Or could it have been a combination of the two?

She watered his feet with tears from her heart. She used her crown and glory to dry his precious feet. It was considered a disgrace for a woman to unbind her hair in public before strangers, but she was using her hair for her Savior’s feet. “She kissed [his feet]” as an intense sign of her devotion. “She poured perfume on them,” a generous offering to worship her Savior.

Simon reasoned that either Jesus didn't know the true character of this woman or he knew and yet allowed her actions. In either case in Simon's eyes this seemed to show that Jesus could not be a prophet. Jesus, knowing all, addresses his thoughts with a parable.

"Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

A denarius was a coin worth about as much as a day's wage. Putting this into today's terms: the national average wage in America is \$43,000. One debtor owed about \$80,000, the other, just over two month's salary. Both could have been sent to jail, because they didn't have the money to pay the individual who loaned them the money. But the man who loaned the money canceled both debts. The parable was directed at the woman and Simon, the Pharisee. The point is the cancelling of unequal debts and who would then express more love toward the benefactor. As a Pharisee, Simon didn't feel he had sins that needed to be forgiven, thus his lack of love toward the Savior. As a woman who had lived a sinful life, she had much love to show, for she had been forgiven much.

It is very important that we answer the question, "Why did Jesus forgive this woman?" Many misinterpret this story as if our works can earn forgiveness; that the actions of the woman caused the Savior to grant her forgiveness. The Bible is very clear; our works do not earn forgiveness. They cannot. Our answer is found in the story of the two debtors. Forgiveness comes first and then love shows itself through action. Why did Jesus forgive this woman? Not because she loved first, but because Jesus first loved her.

At some point in her life, this woman had heard that sin puts human beings in debt with God, debt that cannot be paid with good works or best efforts, and that God does not grant the inheritance of heaven to sinful human beings who carry the debt of sin. This woman's conscience must have tormented her - knowing that her life of sin, gross, public sin, gave her no chance to be right with God. Perhaps she even despaired that her sin was great, that God could not forgive her.

This woman also heard that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, the Savior who freely pays debts. She had repented. And in faith, she had come to learn that Jesus had forgiven her of her sins. In faith, she looked to him to wash away her sordid past.

Jesus said to her, **"Your faith has saved you." (vs50)** Her faith had been a gift from the Holy Spirit, who planted that seed in her heart when she had heard about Jesus' love for her. Her faith was simply the hand that received the forgiveness he so graciously offered. Through faith, she was saved, rescued from mortal danger.

Jesus confirmed that absolution and now personally said to her, **"Your sins are forgiven." (vs48)** Forgiveness - the word means "sent away." Even though the people of that town knew her sin, although her throbbing conscience reminded her of that sin, it was as if God could no longer find her sin. Jesus further reassures her by using a perfect tense of the Greek verb forgiven - she had been forgiven and still stands forgiven.

Finally Jesus said, **"Go in peace." (vs50)** The troubled heart rests knowing that all is right with God, because of his love for the sinner. At peace, she washes his feet with her tears, with the perfume, with her hair, kisses him and says, "This is my way of saying Thank you for cancelling my debt!"

The average credit card debt per household in America in 2009 was \$16,007. Average total debt in 2009 (including credit cards, mortgage, home equity, student loans and more) for U.S. households that carried a

credit card debt was \$54,000. Average, unpaid credit card balance per month was \$3,389.

(<http://www.creditcards.com/credit-card-news/credit-card-industry-facts-personal-debt-statistics-1276.php#ixzz1H3XpPaHl>)

I find it somewhat ironic... that with all the debt Americans owe other people, there is this very noticeable sense of entitlement among many people; this idea everyone owes me something. As Christians who have the Word of God, we know that this attitude is born of our sinful nature. It is the sinful nature that tries to deny that we owe God anything at all, or that our debt of sin isn't that big of a deal. Do we even have debt with God?

Consider the woman. She had lived a sinful life. Is that not true of each and every one of us? Is there not a reason why King David himself prayed, "LORD, remember not the sins of my youth?" Both young and old and everywhere in between, we can look back on our lives and agree. Whether our sins were public or we hid them away in private, we all have sordid pasts. Think about how you have spent your time on this earth. As a child, did I always give my parents the respect due them, even as a teenager? As a parent, have I always been faithful bringing up my children in the training and instruction of the Lord? Have I always been careful to show them love and compassion? Husbands, have we carried out our God-given role as head of the home? Have we exercised our spiritual leadership by serving our spouse and children? Have we faithfully led our family to the Word of God? Wives, have you carried out your God-given role as helper and companion, respecting and supporting your husband? And the older we grow, the more we look back and reflect on our time. Maybe your past isn't as bad as someone else's. The ugly truth remains; we have lived lives tainted with the stain of sin. For that sin, we owe God with our lives. We owe him an eternity of suffering. Can we pay that debt? No more than we can pay off the national debt.

There are a host of get-out-of-debt gurus from Dave Ramsey to Suze Orman to The Motley Fool (www.fool.com), even your own family members and friends tell their success stories how they sacrificed and took on extra work and they paid off their debt. There are no stories like that in the relationship with the Almighty God. We cannot do it ourselves.

This is why we sing with the hymnwriter, "**Chief of sinners though I be, Jesus shed his blood for me.**" Christ paid the price that you and I cannot pay. He has paid the Father everything you owe him, the eternity in hell, your very life, which he endured on the cross. He cancelled the debt of sin by taking that debt on himself, paid it with his life, and then stamped it with his resurrection to prove payment had been made. Just as Jesus said to the sinful woman he says to you, "You are forgiven," your sins are sent away, God doesn't see them anymore.

Through faith you have received that forgiveness. Through faith your troubled past is swept away. In a few minutes Jesus will reassure you of that forgiveness, "Here's the price I paid: my body, my blood, which I give to you to remind you that no matter what your past, no matter how private or public your sin, it is forgiven. Go in peace." Through faith Jesus sets your heart at rest.

If you are one of the millions of Americans who has debt, how would you feel if you went home today and a generous individual came along and said, "I'm going to pay your debt off, all of it! Don't worry about repayment." How would you feel to have that financial freedom? How much more is our joy because of our spiritual freedom? For rescuing us from certain death, from God's wrath, from an eternal separation from him in hell, for giving us the gift of an eternity in heaven, which we cannot repay, nor does he ask us to, how we can thank him for that?

We will wash his feet with our tears, pour perfume on his feet, we will kiss his feet. We will show our love to him by committing ourselves to him. We will spend time with him. We will make his Word and Sacrament a priority so that he will remind us how much he loves us. We will make commitment to bring God's Word to our family, husband to his wife, parent to the child, child to the aged parent, church member with church member, church member with the unchurched and inactives members, and we will tell them about Christ's commitment to them, and how much he loves them, so much that he forgives their sins.

To God alone be the glory! Amen.