

Extreme Forgiveness – Luke 7:36-50

Last week we began a series entitled Going to Extremes as we continue to work through the life of Christ as recorded by Luke

Having started with Extreme Love for our enemies . . .

This week we turn to an equally difficult, and equally un-natural extreme – Extreme Forgiveness

Talking about forgiveness from two perspectives this morning –

The forgiveness we receive from God for our sin

And the forgiveness we extend to others for their offenses

Our life depends on the one

Our joy on the other

The one is freely given (by God), and we hesitate to receive it

While the other is often withheld (by us), and desperately needs to be given

Turn to Luke 7:36-50

Pray – Lord, prepare our hearts to receive your forgiveness if we haven’t, and to extend it if we have

Read Lk 7:36-50

Want to approach this a little different this morning

Start by unpacking the story – explaining background, setting, people involved

Then unfold the truth – applying this extreme forgiveness to our lives today

UNPACKING THE STORY

• Customs and courtesies (v36, 44-46)

Large meals in those days were often held in open courtyards in front of homes

Guests would recline at a low table on one elbow with their legs slightly folded behind and to the side of them

Left their feet exposed and away from the table

According to custom, the doors of the courtyard were left open

Allowing people to stand at the periphery to listen and observe

If poor, take advantage of any leftovers – that might be why this woman was there

36 – Don’t know why Simon invited Jesus

But it *was* considered a meritorious act, good work, to invite a traveling rabbi to a meal

Possible he was curious or genuinely interested in Jesus and what he taught

But it seems that Simon didn’t want to appear too interested, or to chummy with Jesus, because his hospitality was a bit rude

It was common courtesy to give a kiss of peace upon entering

And have your servants wash the feet of the guests

And show them honor by anointing them with oil, which also served to freshen them up before the meal

• The woman (v37,39)

Referred to as a *sinner* – one who has a reputation for gross immorality

Put that together with her unbound hair, which according to Jewish custom was akin to exposing your breasts in public . . .

And Simon’s reference to “touching,” (39b) which is a word used in other parts of Scripture to describe the touching of sexual intimacy . . .

She was more than likely a prostitute – seeking the favor and forgiveness of Jesus

• Kissing his feet (v38,45)

Some try to advocate a sexual overtone to this passage

Which might have some validity if it wasn’t based on a blatant disregard for the context, and an ignorance of the cultural mindset re feet

The woman is broken, not aroused – there’s nothing sexual about having so many tears running down your face that they wet someone’s feet to the extent they need to be dried – that’s brokenness, not sexuality

And in that culture, feet were considered unclean and offensive, repulsive to touch

Anything but sexual

• Pharisees

Strictly religious, good people, well thought of

Law-abiding follower of God who believed that their adherence to the letter of the law insured their salvation

Often self-righteous toward others due to their strict life, compared to the loose life of those around them

• The parable (v41-43)

A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning

Jesus is making the point that unless you recognize your debt, your spiritual bankruptcy, you can’t be forgiven – your sin-debt can’t be cancelled

And if you do, and you are, it will show in an outpouring of gratitude

That’s why the woman shows more love than Simon – because he didn’t recognize that his self-accomplished moralism was just as sinful as her self-indulgent hedonism

Consequently, he wasn’t forgiven and loved little, while she was, and loved much

• Forgiveness and love (v47)

The issue in v47 is that if you don’t understand the meaning, and take into account the context, you will walk away with a messed up view of forgiveness/salvation

For (47) – not intended to show the cause of her forgiveness, but evidence of it

For this reason *she loved much*

The point is this – the degree to which you recognize the depravity of your soul, not what you’ve done or haven’t done, that determines the extent of your love when forgiven

So those forgiven much are those who realize the depths of their sin and desperation, and consequently love much when relieved of it

While those forgiven little are those who don’t recognize their sinfulness and think they have very little need of forgiveness; and consequently love very little – that’s Simon

Those forgiven much, love much; Those forgiven little, love little

UNFOLDING THE TRUTH

The whole point of this passage is that the woman did what she did because she was forgiven like she was; She was the recipient of extreme forgiveness . . .

Forgiveness begins with brokenness

• Over your sin

Brokenness because it grieves God; Because your life is a mess; You’ve hurt others

This woman was obviously broken over her sin – she was mess

Couldn’t help but think of a dear friend of mine – Eddie

Grew up in the projects of Chicago; Married shortly after high school

Got involved in drugs and promiscuity, both of which he hid from his wife
Eventually was caught, convicted, and sentenced to 4 years in prison on drug charges
While there, God convicted him of his sin and his need for forgiveness . . .
And he was broken – that’s where forgiveness begins – brokenness over your sin

So much so . . .

- That it leads to repentance

Repentance that says – I’m a sinner, I admit it; I’m wrong, please forgive me
I’m done, please help me

That’s *offensive* to some (Hughes, 279)

Like the duchess who was invited to hear the 18th c. evangelist George Whitefield preach
After the service, she wrote back to the Countess of Huntingdon who had invited her,
and said this –

**“It is monstrous to be told, that you have a heart as sinful as the common wretches
that crawl on the earth. This is highly offensive and insulting; and I cannot but
wonder that your Ladyship should relish any sentiments so much at variance with
high rank and good breeding.”** (Hughes, 279)

Translated – I’m offended, and can’t believe you believe such stuff; because we’re *better*
than that

- That results in honesty

Prov 28:13 – *Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses
and forsakes them will obtain mercy.*

True brokenness always results in complete honesty – no matter what the shame/conseq’s.
Honesty without any excuses; Honesty that admits your helplessness
That though you may be able to improve yourself or your character to some extent, you
can never wipe out your status as a sinner, apart from brokenness that results in
honesty

It was that kind of honesty that led Eddie to call his wife, and confess not only the full
extent of his drug use, most of which she knew due to this conviction . . .
But also his adultery with another woman that led to a child out of wedlock
Forgiveness begins with brokenness over your sin, leads to repentance, and results in
honesty – and it’s sometimes offensive to those who don’t see their sin

But for those who do . . .

- It’s a relief

That’s what Eddie experienced – relief, even though Phyllis divorced him immediately
As painful as that was, the relief of hidden guilt, of years of hurt, of being right with
God and others, was worth it
I just heard of a man who killed 3 children, and though he was never caught, he turned
himself in and came clean
When asked why he did that, he said he wanted to sleep at night
Brokenness that results in honesty is a relief

That was Eddie’s day of brokenness and forgiveness – How about you?

Have you had your day? Is this it? Is this your day . . .

To break open the flood gates and take off the mask?

You stop rationalizing that you can deal with your mess, your pain, your hurt?

That’s it’s not that big of a deal?

You stop making excuses and lying to yourself and others?

You finally break down and cry out to God, and to others, for forgiveness?

Forgiveness depends on faith

Jesus forgave the woman because of her faith in him (50)

- He will forgive *you* because of your faith in him

Whether you’re a high-class moralist or a low-class prostitute, you need forgiveness

We all need forgiveness; Because all of us have sinned and are sinful

That forgiveness depends on faith that his promises to cleanse you, to relieve your guilt,
and to remove your punishment are true and sure

Faith that he *wants* to forgive you

- But forgiveness is not automatic

Not forgiven because you were baptized as an infant

Because you eat bread and drink wine in church

Because you took a class or were confirmed

That’s not in the Bible

What *is* in the Bible is that forgiveness depends on faith – faith that Christ died for your
sins, and that he’s done everything to relieve guilty verdict hanging over your head

Prayer of salvation?

Divorce was not the end of Eddie and Phyllis’ story

Eddie grew in the Lord while in prison, and prayed they would be reconciled some day

Meanwhile, God had to do a work in Phyllis’ heart as well

After he was released, over the course of the next year and a half, they talked – at first
cautiously, and then more

And slowly, Phyllis began to forgive, and trust; And God began to rekindle their love

Forgiveness depends on faith, and when it comes to forgiving others, it depends on . . .

- Faith that God has changed them

These truths might not be so bad if we didn’t have to apply them to earthly relationships

But Col 3:13 says – *as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive*

That forgiveness depends on faith that God has changed them

Trusting that they won’t hurt you again; That they’re genuinely sorry

Phyllis had to have faith that God had done a supernatural work of grace in Eddie’s life

And Eddie had to show it

Her alternative was hatred and bitterness – which only hardens your heart, clouds your
thinking, and eats away at you like an insidious cancer

She had to *choose* to forgive; and she had to have . . .

- Faith that God will help you

Help you keep on forgiving, when the memory of the offense won’t go away

When it keeps knocking at your door

Help you moment by moment at first, when the pain is fresh

Help you each day and week when it pops back in your head

Help you every month and year when the offense rears it’s ugly head

And eventually help you remember without resentment

Forgiveness depends on faith . . .

That God can and will forgive you

That (when it comes to others) God has changed them

That God will help you

It begins with brokenness, depends on faith, and leads to love

Forgiveness leads to love

- Love for the Lord

Because of what he's done in forgiving you

That overflows from the bottom of your heart

That wild horses couldn't keep you from expressing – in worship, service, giving, life

- Love for others

Love that's sometimes costly, but always free

Dr. Mark Amstutz, Professor of Political Science at Wheaton College tells the story of a woman he met in Rwanda while studying the effect of forgiveness in lands of turmoil

This woman had been raped, her husband murdered, and her children killed in the genocide of 1994

Needless to say, she suffered deep depression, until she realized, by faith, that if she didn't forgive, she would be incarcerated by the pain of her past.

Realizing that, she requested to speak in jails, she wound up meeting the man who killed her family; And upon hearing his confession, she forgave him in person.

If that weren't enough, when the man was released from prison, he and his fiancé had nowhere to live, so the woman invited them to stay with her.

Instead of seeking justice, she extended forgiveness that led to love. (Wheaton Mag)

That's extreme; And unfortunately . . .

- That's repulsive to some

Like Simon – who didn't understand it, and was too calloused to see a need for it

Maybe even to you – maybe you think that woman went plenty far in forgiving her husband's murderer; she didn't need to invite him into her home

Maybe you think he ought to rot on the streets

Maybe you think Phyllis should have gone on with her life

That kind of love is very repulsive to some of you, because you think you've been forgiven very little

Because of Phyllis' forgiveness, they eventually remarried, have 3 beautiful kids, and are house parents for 12 high school boys at a school for at risk youth

Extreme forgiveness leads to extreme love

Have you received it?

Have you given it?

Do you show it?