

ENCOUNTERING JESUS
A “Sinful Woman”
Luke 7:36-50
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I invite you to read these well-known verses aloud with me.

For God so **loved the world** that he gave his one and only Son, that **whoever** believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world **to condemn** the world, but **to save** the world through him. John 3:16 & 17

Our sermon series this summer is called, “Encountering Jesus.” We’re exploring one on one encounters Jesus had with individuals in the Gospels. I asked you to read John 3:16 & 17 because those verses highlight important truths about the interactions Jesus had with everyone He met. Jesus reached out in **love** to **whomever** He encountered. And contrary to popular opinion God didn’t send Jesus to **condemn** us; He sent Him to **save** us.

It seems like we’re hard-wired to expect condemnation or judgment when we do wrong, especially from people we view as authority figures. Think about what it would be like to encounter a holy, perfect God who knows everything, in the flesh. I don’t think I’d approach Jesus without thinking about the questionable things I’d done or said or thought that day. My natural inclination would be to expect Jesus to judge me or at the very least to urge me to do better. But that wasn’t the way Jesus interacted with people. Sinners flocked to Him—even when it drew the stares, whispers and disgust of good people who were intent on judging and criticizing them. Sinners were drawn to Jesus like a magnet, because they sensed they’d find love, grace, mercy and forgiveness. Listen again as I read John chapter verses 16 & 17:

For God so **loved the world** that he gave his one and only Son, that **whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life**. For **God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world** through him.

We have two goals in preaching this series: First, we want everyone to understand that Jesus meets us right where we are. We don’t have to clean ourselves up. He welcomes us with the promise that He’ll take care of any clean-up that’s needed. As we study Jesus’ interactions with all kinds of individuals, I hope we’ll realize that Jesus is reaching out to us with that same love, grace and forgiveness. **Secondly, we hope each of us will learn how Jesus**

wants us to interact with others. As followers of Jesus He desires to communicate who He is to others through us, his followers. I like the statement, *“You are the only Jesus some people will ever see.”* As Jesus’ followers, we are his hands and feet and heart.

The encounter we’re looking at this morning is found in Luke’s Gospel chapter 7. Here we read about Jesus encountering and I quote, *“a woman who lived a sinful life.”* Before we examine this woman’s interaction with Jesus, I want to point out something that occurred to me this week as I was thinking about Jesus’ encounters with people in the Gospels. In many cases—and it’s true of this one—Jesus spoke to by-standers as well as to the individual with whom He was interacting. Jesus ministered emotional, spiritual or physical healing to the individual, but as He did so He spoke words of truth to the people around Him.

In this case, the person on the receiving end of Jesus’ teaching was a Pharisee named Simon who was hosting Jesus to his home. It seems like Jesus and the Pharisees were in constant conflict, so why would a Pharisee invite Jesus to his home? My guess is that this was a set-up, that Simon wanted to question Jesus and try to trap Him in his words or that he wanted to set Him up to do something questionable. This wasn’t simply a neighborly invitation from one respected religious leader to another. Luke goes out of his way in his Gospel to show us the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees—5x in the 2 chapters before Luke 7, the Pharisees take issue with Jesus.

- The Pharisees accused Jesus of blasphemy for telling a man his sins were forgiven.
- They complained about Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners.
- They asked his disciples why Jesus and his disciples don’t fast.
- They accused Jesus of breaking the Sabbath rule against harvesting, because his disciples were plucking heads of wheat and eating them as they walked through a field.
- And the Pharisees were furious with Jesus for healing a man with a crippled hand on the Sabbath, so much so that began discussing what they might do to Him.

Simon’s motive for inviting Jesus to his house for dinner was something other than hospitality and Jesus didn’t disappoint Him. I’ll begin reading at verse 36 of Luke chapter 7...

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 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 7:36-38

Jesus was eating dinner at Simon's house and a "*woman in that town who lived a sinful life,*" learned that He was going to be there and she took a jar of perfume to anoint Jesus. Obviously, her nickname—"a woman who lived a sinful life"—came with a reputation. This woman may have been a prostitute, or a woman known to be promiscuous in her relationships or perhaps one who openly cheated on her husband. Whatever the exact nature of her sin, it's safe to say her notoriety pointed to some type of sexual immorality. Her reputation assured that no self-respecting person—especially a religious leader—would interact with her in public. And yet she approached Jesus—in a Pharisee's house—and He accepted her.

Imagine the courage she displayed. She walked into a religious leader's home uninvited, and as she went in she probably drew stares, gaping mouths, whispers and perhaps even verbal harassment from the men gathered at this dinner. She was apparently oblivious to it all or if she noticed it, she ignored it, because she was so focused on Jesus. She went to Him weeping, cried all over his feet, dried his feet with her hair, kissed them and then poured perfume on them.

Simon the host was indignant and in verse 39 we read,

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." Luke 7:39

Some Bible scholars speculate that Simon or another Pharisee may have arranged for this woman to come to his house or at least made sure that she'd know Jesus would be at Simon's house. Whatever the circumstances around her coming, Simon said to Himself, "*If Jesus were really a holy man then He'd know this woman was a sinner and wouldn't allow her to touch Him.*" And then Jesus, as He did so often in the New Testament, answered Simon. Jesus had the disconcerting habit of "answering people" when they whispered something no one could possibly hear or when they thought something to themselves. And He does it here. I'll pick up reading at verse 40:

Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you."

"Tell me, teacher," he said.

"Two people 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 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. Luke 7:40-43

As He accepted this woman and extended love, grace and forgiveness to her, Jesus took the opportunity to confront the religious superiority of Simon and the other religious leaders in attendance. He told Simon a simple parable about forgiveness and while Simon answered the question correctly, he completely missed Jesus’ point. Translating the parable to the situation unfolding before them, the “sinful woman” owed the large debt and Simon the Pharisee owed a small debt. So, it would follow that the woman would naturally be more grateful to Jesus than Simon for forgiving her large debt. Jesus’ parable—at face value—confirmed the understanding of the people of his day...and of our day. It’s human nature to think about our relationship with God as “scale based.” Our good deeds are weighed against our bad deeds and as long as the good outweigh the bad we’re good to go. That’s the economy of our world, but it’s not God’s economy.

In God’s economy the “sinful woman” and Simon both desperately needed God’s grace and forgiveness. **The primary difference between Simon and the “sinful woman” in Jesus’ eyes wasn’t the degree or amount of their sin, it was their recognition (or lack of recognition) of their need of God’s grace and forgiveness.**

Jesus explains this as he continues his dialogue with Simon in verses 44-47:

Then he turned toward 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.” Luke 7:44-47

Simon and his colleagues may have thought they were setting Jesus up, but Jesus turned the tables on them. He points out to Simon how even by worldly standards he had treated Jesus poorly. Simon didn’t show Jesus the customary respect that a guest in that culture normally received—he didn’t wash his feet or greet him with a kiss or put oil on his head. Meanwhile, the “sinful woman” washed Jesus’ feet and dried them with her hair. She repeatedly kissed his feet. And she anointed Him with perfume. Simon’s lack of love and

respect showed how little he thought he needed Jesus' grace and forgiveness, while the woman's response demonstrated her understanding of her deep need. And because of that Jesus said, "*Her many sins have been forgiven.*"

Jesus then turned back to the woman and said, "*Your sins are forgiven.*" And then we read, "*The other guests began to say among themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?'*" Then Jesus said to the woman, "*Your faith has saved you; go in peace.*" Luke 7:36-50

Isn't this amazing encounter? Who do you most identify with in this story—"the sinful woman" or Simon? Before you answer that, understand I'm not asking you about the amount of sin you perceive in your life or what you've done in the past...whether you've sinned openly like the woman or been a basically good, religious person like Simon. Who do you most identify with in regard to your need of Jesus' grace and forgiveness? **Are you broken, hurting and aware of your need like the woman in the story, or are you, like Simon, feeling pretty good about yourself and the degree to which your life together?**

As I began the sermon I mentioned that our two goals for the series are that we'd learn more about how Jesus receives each of us and that we'd embrace the fact that others encounter Jesus through us. Today's story from Luke 7 makes it clear that those goals go hand in hand. **The Jesus we present to others is the Jesus we know and experience ourselves.** If we struggle to accept God's love, grace and forgiveness, we're going to struggle to share his love, grace and forgiveness to others. We may genuinely love people and want them to know God, but if we're not personally tapped into his grace, it'll be difficult to share grace and forgiveness with others. It's been said often, but it bears repeating, **"We can't give away what we don't have."**

To help bring this home for us, I want to share a quote from Jesus from Matthew's Gospel—chapter 9 verses 13 & 14. Interestingly, it came in the midst of another conflict with Pharisees. In this instance the Pharisees were asking Jesus' disciples (they knew better than to ask Him directly) why their master ate with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus said,

It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." Matthew 9:12 & 13

When they heard that, I can envision the Pharisees puffing out their chests and saying, *“Well, Jesus, if you came for the sick and broken, I guess you’re not here for us, because we’re healthy and holy and righteous.”* The Pharisees somehow overlooked a truth that was emphasized in their Jewish Scriptures, *“There is no one who is righteous, not even one.”* Psalms 14 & 53

My encouragement to us this morning is to accept Jesus’ view of us, rather than our world’s view. Jesus views everyone of us as sinful, broken and sick. He doesn’t subscribe to our world view that says, *“Do more good than bad and look good in front of others and I’ll consider myself fortunate to have you on my team.”* When you and I view ourselves honestly and come before Jesus in humility and brokenness, He will extend grace and forgiveness and healing and wholeness to us and when we interact with others in their sin, brokenness and sickness, they’ll experience Jesus’ grace and healing from us.