

LOVE – THE RESULT OF FORGIVENESS

Can you imagine being in debt and not having any money to pay the bills. Back in the Great Depression, many people went into debt just to feed their families. There were not any food stamps and few government assistance programs. Sometimes there was the neighborhood grocer who would put what you bought "on your bill" knowing that you may never be able to pay. There was a grocer in our home town like that and when my parents could not pay, they just "carried it over". As far as I know, they never ask my folk to pay up even though many years had gone by, and I doubt that if the bill had never been paid that they would have said anything. I remember when my mother had saved up enough money, that she went to the family that owned the grocery and paid the elderly couple who were retired at that time. The son of that couple operated a grocery store in our town and my mother always traded with them even though there were big chain stores in town: the A&P, Piggly Wiggly, Winn-Dixie. My mother bought her groceries at Sances Grocery and Market. She always said, they've got the best meat in town; that's why I trade with them. I suspect that the real reason was that it was her way of showing the love and appreciation that she felt toward the Sances family for the kindness and willingness to ignore the debt that our family owed. This is really what forgiveness is all about, the ability to ignore a debt owed and not hold it against the person that owes the debt.

A significant portion of the Good News that Jesus came to proclaim centered around the issue of forgiveness, especially the forgiveness that God offers to people who will turn to Him in repentance and

accept His forgiveness. Luke captures an incident that illustrates how people should respond when they have been forgiven.

LUKE 7:36-38 It seems somewhat unlikely that a Pharisee would invite Jesus to his home for a meal; however, we need to realize that not all the Pharisee were militantly against the ministry of Jesus. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea are two good examples of Pharisee that were supportive of Jesus. This particular Pharisee's name was Simon. We may also find it strange that someone could just walk in off the street and come into someone's dinner, but apparently these people were very hospitable to anyone that came to their homes whether invited or not.

The woman who came in was known as a person of poor reputation (a sinner) and it has been speculated she was a prostitute – but the Scriptures are silent on this issue. She found Jesus, went to where He was and began to weep as she stood behind Him. The tears dropped onto His feet and in her embarrassment she tried to dry them with her hair. In an expression of love and gratitude she then kissed His feet and eventually poured the expensive ointment on Jesus' feet. She may have intended to simply give Him the box of ointment as a gift of appreciation, but the tears started flowing and she wound up doing all these other things.

LUKE 7:39-43 Jesus could have stopped the woman from doing what she did and He certainly knew about her background. I'm sure that she had come into contact with Jesus and had experience the forgiving kind of love that Jesus gave to people. She may have been the woman

that was caught in the act of adultery that was brought to Jesus as described in the 8th chapter of John. His handling of that situation would have certainly been a life changing experience for anyone. We aren't told what it was and apparently it is not important to the truth that Luke is conveying to us. Simon, the Pharisee, did not know the circumstances that had happened to the woman and that her life had been changed by Jesus. He just assumed that people never change or get worse and he was appalled that Jesus would let such a woman even touch Him. Jesus read his mind and told him a parable about two debtors. One debtor owed little and the other one owed a lot. Jesus then posed the question of their responses if their debts are forgiven them and, of course, Simon got the answer right because he knew human nature.

Simon was not prepared for the comparison and contrast that Jesus was about to show to him as He compared the sinful woman with Simon the Pharisee.

LUKE 7:44-47 What a stark contrast of a self-satisfied, self-righteous, highly religious person and that of a dissatisfied, low-self esteem, and nonreligious person after they had encountered Jesus. In the first case the Pharisee did not realize that he had great spiritual needs and, as a consequence of this lack of realization, did not have any sense of gratitude and love toward Jesus. The woman, on the other hand, knew she had needs and found these needs satisfied in Jesus and she was so grateful that she just had to do something to show the love that she felt for Jesus. This love is expressed quietly in the gift of the perfumed ointment and shows up boldly in the turn of events that happened when her gratitude overflowed in tears.

In one of John's letters, he writes that we love God because He first loved us. How well this is illustrated in this story that Luke has preserved.

Jesus continued to surprise the other guests at the dinner when He turned to the woman and said "Your sins are forgiven." (Luke 7:48)

LUKE 7:49-50 Jesus was aware of the attitudes and opinions of the Pharisee that only God could forgive sins and, perhaps because of this awareness, he told the woman that her sins were forgiven. In doing so He was declaring to these people that He is, in fact, God.

There are several important truths that we can pick up from this narrative:

1. We do not know what has transpired in the life of people, even people of bad reputation. Therefore, we should not be quick to judge others.
2. Even though we recognize that only God can forgive sins, we can certainly be forgiving of others that have wronged us. The benefits of such forgiveness are so great that we should never hold back.
3. Those that are heavily involved in religious activities can become blind to their own subtle sins and not see the need for forgiveness.
4. Our response to God should be one of gratitude and love because He has forgiven us a debt that we could never repay.