

The Prostitute: Loving Jesus Much
People Jesus Met, Part 13
Lon Solomon
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Well, I'd like to say a big welcome this morning to all of our friends out at our Loudoun campus and also all of our friends watching around the world on our Internet campus, so good morning to you. Thanks so much for being with us!

Hey, I wonder what you would say if I were to ask you to name the greatest sports record of all time. Now I don't know, maybe some of us would say it was Joe DiMaggio's 56-game hitting streak. Maybe some of us would say it was Wilt Chamberlain scoring a hundred points in a single NBA game, or perhaps it was Cy Young winning 511 victories in his pitching career. Maybe some of us might point to Michael Phelps winning 8 gold medals in one Olympics or to Tom Dempsey's 63-yard field goal. Here's one you could bet your mortgage on, Byron Nelson having 11 consecutive victories on the PGA tour in 1945. The closest anyone has come to that is Tiger, and the best he could do was five in a row.

The point that I'm trying to make is that, when you've got a lot of choices on a topic, picking out the one greatest choice is sometimes not so easy. Yet when the Lord Jesus Christ was asked what the greatest thing a human being could do in God's sight, He had absolutely no trouble immediately telling us what that is.

This is what we're going to talk about today as we continue in our series "People Jesus Met." We're going to talk today about Jesus meeting a prostitute. We're going to look and see what happened in that meeting, and then we're going to bring all of that forward and talk about what difference that makes for you and me. So here we go in Luke chapter 7, verse 36.

"Now one of the rabbis invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so Jesus went to the rabbi's home. And as He was reclining at the table, there was a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town, and she learned that He was there." Now folks, when

the Bible says this woman had lived a sinful life in His town, that is simply the Bible's gentle way of telling us that she was a prostitute.

Verse 37, "And she brought an alabaster jar of perfume and stood behind Jesus weeping. Then she began to wet His feet with her tears, and she wiped them with her hair, and she poured perfume on them. And when the rabbi who had invited Jesus to dinner saw this, he said, 'If this man Jesus were truly a prophet, He would know who it is that is touching Him and what sort of woman she is, that she is a sinner.'"

Now the rabbi had a deep and serious spiritual problem, and we see it on display here very clearly. The problem is that he was able to say, "She is a sinner," but he was not able to say, "I am a sinner." He was able to understand that she had sins of the flesh, but he was not able to understand that he had sins of the heart, spiritual arrogance, spiritual pride, and spiritual self-righteousness. The hypocrisy of this rabbi upset Jesus so much that He decided to tell the rabbi a story, a parable if you will. Here we go.

"Then Jesus said, 'Simon'"—by the way, we learn the rabbi's name here—"I have something to say to you.' Simon said, 'Well, say it, teacher.' Jesus said, 'Two men both owed money to a certain money lender. One owed him 500 denarii'"—in today's money, this is about \$165,000—"and the other owed him 50 denarii'"—about \$16,000. "Neither of them had the money to pay the money lender back, so he graciously forgave the debt of both men. So, which one of these men do you think will love the money lender more?' Then Simon replied, 'Well, I suppose it would be the one who had the biggest debt forgiven.' And Jesus said, 'You have judged correctly.'"

Now let's stop for a moment before we go on and figure out who is who in this parable. Who do you think is the money lender that these two owed debts to and couldn't pay? Well, that's God. And who do you think the two debtors were who both owed Him debts they couldn't pay? Who do you think they are? Well, they're the prostitute and Rabbi Simon.

The point of the parable is simply this. Listen now. The more a person realizes how big a sin debt they owe almighty God and how utterly bankrupt they are to pay it, the more that person loves God when He graciously forgives them. The really tragic

thing here is that Rabbi Simon owed God just as big a sin debt as the prostitute. See, she understood that she owed God \$165,000, but Rabbi Simon thought he only owed God \$16,000 or maybe not even that much. The tragic thing is that he owed God just as much as she did and wasn't able to pay his debt any more than she was. Because of his spiritual arrogance, he just couldn't see it.

Verse 44, "Then Jesus turned to the woman and said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I entered your house, and you gave Me no water to wash My feet, but she has wet them with her tears and washed them with her hair. You gave Me no kiss at all, but she, from the time I came in, has not ceased kissing My feet. You didn't even anoint My head with oil, but she has anointed My feet with perfume.'" Jesus continued and said, "Therefore I tell you, Simon, her many sins have been forgiven, and this is why she loves much, but he who has been forgiven little loves little."

The truth is that Rabbi Simon loved Jesus zero, not little. He loved Him zero, because he had been forgiven zero. You say, "Well, how can you make a statement like that?" Well, it's real simple, folks. In order to activate God's forgiveness, a person has to do three things. Number one, we have to realize that we're sinners. Number two, we have to realize that we owe God a sin debt that we can never pay. Finally, number three, we have to look to God's undeserved mercy as our only hope of forgiveness. All of this the prostitute had done, and none of this Simon had done.

May I stop for just a moment and say that if you're here today and have never trusted Jesus in a real and personal way, there's a great message here for you. That is, how do you activate God's forgiveness in our modern world? Well, friends, we activate it the same way people did 2000 years ago. We don't activate God's forgiveness with good works or religious activity or trying hard to keep the Ten Commandments or anything else; we activate it by admitting we're sinners and we have a debt to God we can never pay, then throwing ourselves on the mercy of God that is undeserved as our only hope for forgiveness. If you've never done that, then my hope is that you will seriously consider it. There is no other way to unlock and activate the forgiveness of God than this.

Now before we go on to our most important question of the morning, however, there is one other connection that we need to make here, and it is found in John chapter 11. If you remember, John chapter 11 is the chapter where the Lord Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, but the chapter begins like this in verse 1. "Now a man in Bethany, the village of Mary and Martha, named Lazarus was sick." Verse 2, "This Mary, whose brother Lazarus lay sick"—watch—"was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped His feet with her hair." Very interesting! Look at this now! The Bible tells us that this prostitute we just met in Luke chapter 7 is none other than Mary, the sister of Lazarus and of Martha.

Now you say, "Okay, Lon, so why is that important?" Well, it's important, my friends, because of the amazing transformation that the Lord Jesus Christ performed in this woman's life. The Bible tells us that after Mary came to faith in Christ—we talked about her in Luke chapter 10 on Mother's Day—she became a passionate student of God's Word, sitting at Jesus' feet while Martha was running around making all the preparations. Certainly she was one of the many women who ministered to Jesus in Matthew chapter 27 who not only cared for Him during His public ministry but even stood with Him at the cross. Finally, according to church tradition, after the resurrection of Jesus, along with her brother Lazarus, Mary became a missionary, living in Cyprus and going around the entire eastern Mediterranean preaching the gospel. Hey, going from being a prostitute to being a missionary—you talk about a change in life!

But you know, this is what the Lord Jesus Christ does to every single life that He takes over. He transforms us from the inside out. He makes us into people that we never knew we could be. He does things through us that we never knew we could do. This is why the Bible says, in II Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, they become a new creature. Old things pass away, and behold, all things become new."

And you know what's really sad? Rabbi Simon could only see people through his own eyes. Our world system today so often sees people through the eyes of Rabbi Simon. Rabbi Simon sees them just for what they are and pronounced them as a lost cause who doesn't deserve any time, any energy, or any notice.

Ah, but you see, my friends, God sees people differently. God sees people through the eyes of II Corinthians 5:17. To put it another way, God really doesn't care how we look when He gets us, because God is not going to leave us the way He found us! Praise the Lord for that!

It reminds me of one of my favorite poems, which is important, because I don't have very many poems that I like. (laughter) But I love this one, and let me share it with you. It's called "The Touch of the Master's Hand."

It was battered and scarred,
And the auctioneer thought it hardly worth his while
To waste his time on the old violin,
but he held it up with a smile.

"What am I bid, good folks", he cried,
"Who'll start the bidding for me?"
"A dollar, a dollar, now two, only two?"
"Two dollars, and who'll make it three?"
"Three dollars once, three dollars twice, going for three,"

But, no, from the room far back a gray haired man
Came forward and picked up the bow,
Then wiping the dust from the old violin
And tightening all of the strings,
He played a melody pure and sweet
As sweet as an angel sings.

When the music ceased and the auctioneer
With a voice that was quiet and low,
Said "What now am I bid for this old violin?"
And he held it up with the bow.

"One thousand, one thousand, and who'll make it two?"
"Two thousand, and who'll make it three?"
"Three thousand once, three thousand twice,
And going and gone", said he.

The audience cheered,
But some of them cried,
"We just don't understand."
"What changed its worth?"

Swift came the reply.
"Twas the touch of the Master's hand."

And many a person with life out of tune
All battered and torn by sin
Is auctioned cheap to a thoughtless crowd
Much like this old violin

But the Master comes,
And the foolish crowd never can quite understand,
The worth of a soul and the change that is wrought
By the Touch of the Masters' Hand.

You know, folks, you're looking at a living example of this poem and its proof in action. At 22 years old, a world of Rabbi Simons saw me as an insecure, drug-using, alcohol-abusing, narcissistic, sociopathic, pretty much good-for-nothing young man. Ah, but friends, God saw me through the eyes of II Corinthians 5:17. God saw me for what I could become in Jesus Christ.

So many of us have that very same testimony today. So many of us here can say, "Hey, you know what? I may not be all I ought to be, but by the grace of God, I'm not what I used to be." Amen? Amen, and thank God for His amazing grace!
(applause)

Now that leads us to our most important question of the morning. You know what it is, so I hope you're still awake. Are we ready? (audience responds) We're ready? All right, nice and loud, here we go. One, two, three—SO WHAT? (pauses) Y'all can do better than that! Come on now, I know you can. Here we go, one more time. One, two, three—SO WHAT? Oh, that was good!

You say, "Lon, so what difference does this make to me? So you can say a poem. What difference does any of this make to me?" Well, let's talk about that, shall we? Let's ask the question here in Luke chapter 7, "What was it about this woman? What was it about this prostitute that so impressed the Lord Jesus?"

The answer is simple. What impressed Him so much about her is very simply how much she loved Him. We need to understand that in ancient Israel at the time of Jesus, people wore open sandals. After walking all day in these sandals, their feet

became filthy with dust, dung and germs. So when you went into someone's home as a guest, it was customary that they offered you water to wash your feet. However, to wash somebody else's feet was the most degrading, the most humiliating, the most ignominious task that anyone could do for somebody else, because it was the dirtiest part of your body. I mean, this is why in John 13, when the Lord Jesus went to wash Peter's feet, Peter reacted so vehemently and said, "Lord, You're never washing my feet!"

Now would you notice that Rabbi Simon didn't even offer Jesus water to wash His own feet when He came to his house, but Mary washed Jesus' feet with her tears, then she wiped them with her hair. Then she kissed His feet, the dirtiest part of His body, over and over and over again, and she anointed them with perfume. Listen, you don't do this for somebody unless you love them much. You see, this is what impressed the Lord Jesus. What impresses Him is not how much we do for Him; what impresses Him is how much we love Him.

This reminds me of what Jesus said in Matthew chapter 22. Matthew 22:36 said, "Then an expert of the Old Testament law asked Jesus, 'Teacher, what is the greatest commandment in the Law? In the whole Old Testament, pick one out. What is the greatest commandment?'" And oh by the way, on top of the Old Testament, the rabbis had 613 more commandments they had come up with, so Jesus had lots of choices here. Notice that Jesus didn't even hesitate. He replied, "You should love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." Watch. "This is the first and the greatest commandment."

Jesus quotes here from the most enduring passage in the Old Testament to Jewish people. Deuteronomy chapter 6 says, "Hear oh Israel, the Lord your God is one." The next verse says, "And you shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, and with all of your might." This reminds me of commandment number one of the Ten Commandments where God says, "You shall have no other gods besides Me, for I am a jealous God. I want 100% of your love. I want 100% of your devotion."

Just as an aside for a moment, I should point out that this greatest commandment Jesus talks about does teach us something very important about God. It teaches us that God is a personal being, not just some inanimate cosmic force of some kind. The reason I say that is that, friends, you can't fall in love with an inanimate force. You can't fall in love with atomic energy or electromagnetism or karma; you can only fall in love with a person. Besides, electromagnetism can't be jealous of someone else if it doesn't get 100% of your attention; only a person can do that.

But let's get back to what we're talking about and ask the question, "As followers of Jesus Christ here this morning, how much do you and I really love Jesus Christ?" That's the question of the morning.

You say, "Well, Lon, that's a good question. But how in the world could you possibly answer that? How could you possibly quantify that and come up with a grade for yourself?" Oh, I'm so glad you asked! We're going to take a little test this morning. You grade yourself. I've come up with five characteristics of how people act when they love someone. I'm going to walk you through the five of them very quickly, and I'm going to ask you to grade yourself from 1 to 10. Ten means you're absolutely perfect, impeccable, superb on this. One means you stink. You understand how you do this. All right, so here we go. You grade yourself on five of these.

Number one, when you love someone, you yearn to be with them. I mean, how many young couples in love are satisfied if they only get to be together every other Tuesday and Thursday? No, no, no, when you love someone, you want to be with them every moment of every day. Well, God reveals Himself to us in the Word of God, in prayer, in meditation. We can tell, number one, how much we love God by how much we yearn to spend time with God in prayer, in studying the Word, in spiritual meditation. Grade yourself on that. How did you do, from one to ten?

Number two, when you love somebody, you want to please them. For example, gentlemen, when it comes to our girlfriends, to our fiancées, or to our wives, you know what we do. We try to learn what her favorite restaurant is, what her favorite flowers are, what her favorite vacation spot is, what her favorite activity is. We try to help out

around the home, to help out with chores. We try desperately to remember anniversaries and birthdays and Mother's Day, Valentine's Day, the day we went on our first date, the day we got engaged, the day her cat had kittens and the whole thing. (laughter) Why do we put ourselves through this agony? (laughter) Well, it's because we love her, and we know this makes her happy. When you love somebody, you want to make them happy.

Well, number two, God tells us in the Bible what makes Him happy. John 14:15 says, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." So second of all, we can tell how much we love God by how deeply we are committed to biblical obedience every moment of every day in every detail of our lives, because this pleases God. Grade yourself. How did you do on that one, from one to ten?

Number three, if you love somebody, you are loyal to them. The apostle Paul said in Acts chapter 21, "For I am prepared not only to be imprisoned but also to die for the name of the Lord Jesus." Number three, folks, we can tell how much we love God by how we react when we are given the chance to take a stand for Him with our neighbors, with our families, at the office, or at school. We can tell how much we love God by whether we're willing to step out of the shadows and take our place at Jesus' side whatever the cost, and whether we're ultimately loyal to Him. Grade yourself on that from one to ten.

Number four, when we love somebody, we're anxious to tell other people about them. Have you ever met somebody who is convinced that they have just encountered the love of their life, their soul mate, their absolute compliment? Have you ever met somebody like that? All they want to do is talk about that person. They won't shut up! It's like all, "she, her, her, her" or "him, him, him." It's like, "Could we talk about something else?" "No, no, we've got to talk about him or her." Why? Because when you love somebody, you want to talk about them.

Well, David said, "I will extol the Lord at all times. His praise will always be on my lips." David said, "I love God, and therefore, I love talking about Him." So number four, we can tell how much we love God by how anxious we are to talk about Him and tell other people about Him.

Finally, number five, if we love somebody, that person becomes the central focus of our life. Think about it for a moment. If your fiancé, your husband, your wife, your girlfriend, your boyfriend, or your children were suddenly just yanked out of your life, would that make any difference in your weekly schedule? Would it make any difference in the way you spend your money? Would it make any difference in the way you use your time and your energy? Well, of course it would! You have built your whole life around these people that you love. Of course it would make a difference if they weren't there!

Folks, if God were suddenly yanked out of your life, would it make any real difference in how you spend your time, in how you spend your energy, in what your daily schedule is, or in how you spend your money? Hey, we can tell how much we love God by how much of a central focus He is in our life.

Okay, time to total it up. Grade yourself on that last one. Here we go. How many people got a 50? Raise your hands? 49? 48? 47? 46? Okay, I didn't either.

You say, "Well, Lon, this is wonderful. I am so glad I came today. I am thoroughly depressed now." (laughter) Wait a minute! The point of this is not to depress us. You know, the great news of the Bible is that, as His children in Jesus Christ, God doesn't love us because we love Him the way we should; God loves us for no good reason at all, and He always will. Praise the Lord for that!

But it does leave us with the question, "How can you and I improve our score? How can you and I grow in our love for the Lord Jesus Christ?" I've got two suggestions, and then we're done for the day.

Suggestion number one to grow in love for the Lord Jesus Christ is to ask God to show you how sinful you really are. This is David's prayer in Psalm 139. He said, "Search me, oh God, and know my heart. Try me and know my anxious thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me. Show me, God, what's really down inside me."

Now I've got to tell you that it takes a lot of courage to pray this prayer, because the more God answers this prayer, the uglier it gets. Listen, friends, we may be followers of Jesus, and our sins may be forgiven, and we may be on our way to heaven and be covered by the blood of Jesus Christ, but don't kid yourself. You and I are still

rotten to the core the way we've always been. Don't kid yourself. The more God shows that to us, the uglier it gets. The picture's not pretty.

You say, "Well, then why in the world would you ever ask God to do this?" Remember what Jesus said about this woman. He said, "The more we realize what we are and the more we realize what God has really forgiven us of, the more we'll love Jesus." That's what He said.

John Newton, the infamous slave trader who became a pastor after his conversion, once said, "The purpose of God in showing us the evil of our own hearts is to make us prize more highly the unconditional love of Jesus." Boy, is that true! If you want to love God more, let Him show you who you really are. So often in my daily life, I will just talk to the Lord and say, "Lord, You and I both know what I really am. And You know what, Lord? It ain't pretty." You know what? It's a good thing to know that, because you appreciate Jesus and His love more.

Number two, if you want to grow in your love for God, then my second suggestion is get to know Him better. Get closer to Him. My mom used to always say, "Familiarity breeds contempt." It took me decades to understand what that means. What it means is that the more you get to know a person, the easier it is to dislike them, because people are imperfect. People are flawed, and the closer we get to people, the more we see these flaws.

Well, but the situation with almighty God, my friends, is completely different. God is perfect. He is impeccable in His love, in His beauty, in His goodness, in His faithfulness, in His mercy, and in His compassion. The closer we get to Him, the more we get to know Him, the more we can't help but love Him. We won't feel contempt for Him; we will love Him.

You say, "Well, Lon, how do I get to know God better? How do I get closer to Him?" We already said it. God reveals Himself to us in the written Word of God, here in the Bible. We need to be students of the Word. We need to be studying it, reading it, and meditating on it—listen here, look here—not so we can grow in our appreciation of theology, but so we can grow in our appreciation of who God is. Hey, listen. Get

into the Word and get to know who God is, and I promise you, the more you get to know Him, the more you will love Him. It just has to be.

Well, let's conclude and say this. The purpose of my message today was not to depress anybody. The purpose of my message today was to inspire us to cultivate a deeper love for the Lord Jesus in our lives than we have presently. The purpose was to inspire us to pursue a purer love, a higher love, and a deeper love for the Lord Jesus Christ, because of everything else, this is what He said is the greatest thing a human being could do. This is what He said impresses Him the most.

So my friends, I urge you today, whatever you scored on the test, make it your goal that the next time we take this test, you are going to score higher. Let's pray together.

Lord Jesus, thanks for speaking to us today about how much You prize, how much You value our love and our devotion. So Lord Jesus, my prayer is that, as we look at what we can offer You, what we can give back to You for all that You have done for us, Lord, help us to remember what You consider to be the major thing. The major thing is that we love You, and if we love You, then all these other things will flow out naturally from our lives. Lord Jesus, show us what we really are. Cause us as a result to appreciate Your forgiveness all the more. Reveal Yourself to us, Lord, that we might understand Your amazing beauty and be drawn to love You all the more. Thank You for talking to us today, Lord. Change the way we live because we were here today. Change the way we love You because we were here today, and we pray these things in Jesus' name, and what did God's people say? Amen. Hey, I hope you have a great weekend! God bless you.