

Message 5: The Motivation of Worship

SUGGESTED PASSAGE: LUKE 7:36-50

³⁶ Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him, and He entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. ³⁷ And there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, ³⁸ and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume. ³⁹ Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner."

⁴⁰ And Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he replied, "Say it, Teacher." ⁴¹ "A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?" ⁴³ Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have judged correctly." ⁴⁴ Turning toward the woman, He said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵ You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. ⁴⁶ You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. ⁴⁷ For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little." ⁴⁸ Then He said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven." ⁴⁹ Those who were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?" ⁵⁰ And He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

INTRODUCTION:

What is worship? Worship is our response to the presence of God.

Some people face a tricky question when it comes time to celebrate Christmas or the birthday of our friends, which is:

what do you give to someone who already has everything? Many of us have someone in our lives who seems to have unending financial resources, and so they purchase for themselves every new gadget or technological device that inventors dream up. It is hard to come up with anything to buy them. If they really want something, you can pretty much assume they have already bought it for themselves. Such people are extremely difficult to buy for, as they already have everything.

In a sense, God is like that. He is the Creator of all that exists, and you would think that He already has everything He wants or needs. But does He? Perhaps one of the things He wants but does not have is your worship! He takes great joy when you offer Him the gift of praise, worship and thanksgiving. It is the perfect gift for the God who has everything!

What is worship? Worship is the spark that enters our souls as a result of falling in love with Jesus.

Do you remember when you were a child how you would sometimes vigorously shuffle your feet across the carpet so that when you touched someone else it released a little spark? It gave them a tiny shock because the friction from your feet moving across the carpet built up some electrical power that was, at a touch, transferred from your body to someone else's body.

Worship is a little like that. When you worship, in a sense, you rub up against God, which produces a sort of spiritual electricity that releases a spark into your life. Worship gives you a jolt of spiritual vitality that doesn't just stay inside you but can be transferred to others.

In Luke 7:36-50 we find one of the great stories about worship in the Gospels. It takes place, of all places, at a party! If you are paying attention, you'll notice that Jesus attends a lot of parties. He was into parties, because that was where He would find a group of people who were not only enjoying themselves, but ready to be touched by God. And that is exactly what happened in this story from Luke's Gospel.



SERMON POINTS:

1. THE SETTING

- A Pharisee named Simon was holding a dinner party and requested that Jesus join him. (When Jesus is invited, He always comes, including into our hearts!)
- When a woman from the city, who was identified as a sinner, learned that Jesus was going to be at this dinner party, she turned up. She brought a jar of perfume and began to anoint His feet. She wept, she wet His feet with her tears, and she wiped them with her hair. Then she anointed them with the perfume.
- Typically, when one would have a party and invite a rabbi to come, it was because you wanted to hear him speak. You would have the dinner in a courtyard, and often other people, who had not been invited to the party itself, could still listen from outside.
- This woman was probably one of the listeners in the courtyard, but she got up the courage to come inside.
- Everyone knew she was a sinner. She had a bad reputation around town. Many biblical scholars assume she was likely a prostitute, a woman of very questionable morals.
- In the eyes of the pious Pharisee, the woman was making a scene. She was crying uncontrollably, with enough tears falling that she could use them to wet Jesus' feet.
- The perfume was extremely expensive, and would have cost about a year's wages, so this was a very extravagant act.
- The act of letting her hair down was a sign of intimacy and availability.
- The Pharisee was scandalized. Here was a sinful woman, letting her hair down and bawling her eyes out. And Jesus didn't seem to be concerned or even be aware of who she was.
- The Pharisee challenged Jesus—if He were a true prophet He would have recognized who this woman really was.

2. A PARABLE OF FORGIVENESS

- Because people walked in sandals along dusty roads, their feet quickly became dirty. So, it was common custom to have the servant clean the feet of the guests.
- Wiping the feet of a guest was the job of a servant.
- The response of Simon the Pharisee, was to judge the woman. He saw himself as morally superior to her. And he thought that Jesus was unaware of the state of her morals.
- But Jesus knew exactly who she was and what she had done. In response, Jesus told a parable.
- Jesus also knew exactly who the Pharisee was. He answered the Pharisee's thoughts. He read his mind and saw his judgmentalism and hypocrisy.
- The parable: A moneylender had two debtors. One owed him 500 denarii, and the other owed him only 50 denarii. Because they couldn't repay their debt, the moneylender forgave both of them. "So," asked Jesus, "which of them therefore will love him more?" (500 denarii would be about two years' wages, whereas 50 would be about two months of wages).
- Simon knew the answer: the one who had been forgiven more would love more. Jesus told him that he was correct.

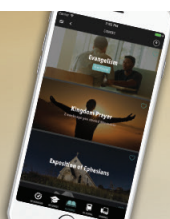
3. THE REALIZATION OF SIN AND THE EMBRACE OF GRACE

- The sinful woman had responded to Jesus in the way that she did because she realized the depth of her sin. She was willing to make a spectacle of herself in order to let Jesus know that she knew she needed His grace, and that she was grateful for the change He was making in her life.
- She responded with worship.
- The people who truly understand the grace of God make the truest worshippers. They know what they have been saved from.
- The true worshipper in this story is not the Pharisee, but the sinful woman. She is responding to the grace of God.
- A primary motivation for worship is gratitude for God's grace and mercy.

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4. FORGIVENESS AND THE INTIMACY OF WORSHIP

- The woman had responded to Jesus through an act of worship, but Simon had not done any of the things that should be done to honor a guest.
- Contrast their ways of worship. Jesus was more than a guest to her. She wasn't just giving a polite nod to Him or doing her duty, but she was intimately serving someone who had changed everything for her. The Pharisee didn't show great gratitude because he was ignorant of his great need of forgiveness.
- Her worship came out of a heart of love and gratitude for grace.
- Self-sufficiency is the great sin of the Bible. We must recognize our need.

5. GRATITUDE INITIATES WORSHIP

- All too often we are like Simon the Pharisee and don't see our own sins as being as bad as those of others.
- We don't recognize how God has given us grace to avoid sin. We couldn't have been able to do that on our own.
- Because he was self-righteous, Simon couldn't really worship. He was more interested in Bible study and theology than in worship.
- True worship is throwing yourself at the feet of the Savior.
- It may involve some tears of repentance and gratitude as it did for the woman.
- It is recognizing the depth of our need.
- It isn't just the action that makes for worship; it is the attitude behind the action.

6. THE KEY QUESTION ABOUT WORSHIP

- The key question about worship is: how much do you love Him?
- If you see yourself through your own eyes, you may think you are pretty good. But you need to see yourself as God sees you—needy for Him.

- Worship is a response to a relationship. In a relationship it is important to express how you feel. It isn't just a religious duty. It isn't just going to church. It is adoring God because of His grace toward you.
- We need to keep remembering what God has done to keep our worship fresh.
- The woman's worship isn't sophisticated or even seemly, but it is passionate and true.
- She broke open the alabaster box of perfume, which was an act of extravagance.
- What costly thing in your life are you willing to relinquish and give to Him?
 - * Your reputation?
 - * Your convenience?
 - * Your security?
- Whether your sins are heinous and public or more of the white-collar variety, you need to recognize what God has saved you from and how much you need Him. A sophisticated sinner is still a sinner.
- Let us never forget where He found us and be filled with gratitude and worship, for He has made us for worship. Don't forget where you came from. That is your motivation for passionate worship.

SERMON ILLUSTRATIONS:

SHOUTING JOHN

Shirley Caesar has a great song called "Hold My Mule," which is the story of Shouting John. Shouting John was not satisfied with the quiet decorum of the church. He was too excited about what God had done for him, and so he made quite a scene in church, shouting aloud his praise for God. Some in the congregation were irritated by this, so they asked the deacons to speak with Shouting John. He explained that he shouted because of the goodness of God and all He had given to him. He just had to shout! He told them of his mule, and how that mule would help him plow to provide food for him and his family. In fact, thinking about the graciousness of God in giving him the mule made him want to shout again. So, he said to one of the deacons, "Hold my mule, I feel a shout coming on!"

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PERSPECTIVE INFLUENCES VISION

Comparing yourself to others is always dangerous. You might think your baby is really cute because it isn't deformed or ugly. But that doesn't mean it is really that cute. Our limited perspective sometimes doesn't allow us to see the way things really are.

A BOY AND HIS DOG

There was once a dog that loved its master, who was just a teenage boy. Whenever the dog saw the boy he would jump up and lick his face or climb onto the bed beside him. He would follow him everywhere. In fact, he would follow him to the bus stop when the young man went to school, and he would wait there at the bus stop for him to return. He was always waiting for the boy to come home. Why did the dog have such an unquenchable love for his young master? It was because the boy had found him when he was a mangy, stray mutt and had taken him home and nursed him to health. The dog never forgot who he was when the boy had found him.

QUOTES BY DR. TONY EVANS:

"We judge others because we don't think we have sinned as badly as they have."

"The folk who love God the most and worship Him the most, are the folk who recognize the pit from which they've been rescued. They recognize the greatness of grace. You show me a man or woman who understands grace and I'll show you a worshipper!"

"If you don't have a desperate need for God, you can't worship Him deeply."

"Grace is not only what God has saved you out of; grace is also what He saved you from getting into."

"Worship is a response to a relationship. If you love someone you want to express your love."

"You can't seek His face and save face at the same time."

