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The Extravagance of Jesus

March 21, 2010

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Luke 7:36 - 50

I don't know about you, but several times this week, (okay, several times *per day*), I was wishing the people around me would change. ☺ I was wishing things would be different.

Have *you* ever felt that way? As though your present life is far away from what you planned for or hoped for? Your dreams, your ideas, the standards you once held—all gone. You thought you were setting things up a certain way, and nothing is happening according to plan. The choices your kids are making, the choices your spouse is making; Okay, let's get real: the choices *you've* been making... are *far* from the dream you had, let alone God's best for your life. But what I love about this reading through the New Testament this year is we get to see how Jesus dealt with all this, even at a dinner party...

36 Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. As was custom, they ate reclining at a table on their left side, so they could eat with their right hand. (It saved on having to rent chairs).

37 When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume," A woman who lived a sinful life. This woman didn't have a name. Considering the whole town knew her reputation, it's odd they didn't also know her name. She was a prostitute. This sounds weird, but often times, the poor people were allowed to visit public banquets to snatch up the leftovers.

And she didn't come empty-handed. She came with her most precious gift—an alabaster jar of perfume (37), Alabaster was a soft stone, imported from Egypt into Palestine, especially popular for perfume and ointments. It was light and creamy, usually lined with veins. It was likely a palm-sized, common flask. Notice that she wasn't wearing the perfume, drawing attention to herself with its scent. She was carrying it in this small alabaster vial.

38 and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. She was drawn to him, closer and closer, until she stood right behind him. And that's when the tears began to flow, from a well so deep inside her, these murky waters had never seen the light of day, slipping down her cheek, to Jesus' feet. Jesus' gaze reflected compassion, not judgment. His words were kind, not cruel.

They left her vulnerable, exposed, repentant, and not caring who saw her or what they thought of her. (When was the last time you were vulnerable?) She KNEW Jesus understood her, forgave her, loved her. He didn't brush off the tears. He didn't send her away. He allowed it. He accepted her worship. Her body soon followed her tears, as she dropped to her knees only inches from the feet of her Savior.

Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. (38). Her hair would have been bound up, according to social custom. Imagine a Middle Eastern woman even today letting down her hair in public. It was considered so bold, so provocative, so abhorrent, it was grounds for divorce. But she was already outcast. She belonged to NO ONE. Except perhaps, this man Jesus.

She was overcome, and He received her adoration. She became more overcome, and let her mouth follow the

same path her fingers had taken and lightly touched His feet with her lips, kissing them.

It was custom to touch a drop of the perfumed ointment to His head. But she had lost her restraint. Extravagantly, yet with purpose, she poured the contents of her precious alabaster jar over his feet.

The same perfume she used to seduce men was poured out—every priceless drop—to honor the one man who would *never use her*. Can you picture the party scene in this moment? There was probably perfume everywhere. No wonder no one knew who she was! I think they were all so embarrassed they all looked away! Nobody was used to such luxury and extravagance! ☺

39 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." Good ole Simon didn't miss a trick. He kept an eye on everything that was said and done around Jesus: and here's this woman making a total idiot of herself and Jesus! So much for Simon's dreams and plans for this evening.

Now Simon may have been sympathetic to Jesus and his ministry. As a Pharisee, it was his sincere desire to observe the Law of God. He gave his life to making the effort, even when other Jews didn't. But he was completely unsympathetic toward this woman.

So Jesus drew Simon in. *40 Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said. 41 "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" 43 Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said.* It's actually a parable I can understand! Two men each get their debt canceled. "Which guy is more grateful?" (It's a no brainer.) Simon the host gets it: "*The one with the bigger debt canceled.*" (43).

44 Then Jesus turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? (Like how could he not?) But Simon had only seen her for WHAT she was, not WHO she was. Y'know, there are so many people I DON'T see. There are so many people I *tell* myself I don't see... when Jesus notices every detail and responds. You may be here "anonymously," but Jesus notices every detail of you, and He responds. But unless we are in some kind of interaction with Him, we miss His response.

Then, Jesus says to Simon, "*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. 45 You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.*" Jesus does acknowledge her many sins. That's simply the reality of her situation, and ours, too. But he doesn't CONDEMN her for her many sins, and maybe, just maybe, He opens Simon's eyes too.

So Jesus says, *47 "Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven-- for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."* And we see again: Those who have lived can never see what those who have died and now live can see. I'll bet, when I sit in church and feel disconnected or just plain bored, and out of tune with the music, let alone out of tune with God, it's *easy* to pass blame on *lots* of stuff, from a bad night's sleep to an argument with my wife. But the truth probably is *I'm* not willing to confess *my* sins, so that my true worship can begin. I *forget* how much I've already been forgiven so my gratitude can flow. I know my spiritual state impacts every other area of my life. If I don't discover the true identity of God, I'm lost.

48 Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." Simon wasn't included in this one. Catch this: Forgiveness is always personal with Jesus. He died for the sins of the whole world, but forgiveness comes to each of us, individually, when we demonstrate our readiness to accept it, turning away from our old ways.

49 The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" 50 Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." It wasn't her LOVE that saved her. It was her FAITH in his power to forgive her. It was her FAITH in His steadfast love for her. Faith is putting her belief into actions, not just words. And Jesus says "...*go in peace.*" Peace comes to those who are willing to move away

from sin and towards the Prince of Peace, until His peace becomes their own.

But plans or no plans, why is it so hard? Sometimes it's externals, and Luke reminds us in this account that other's opinions will always be there. People will talk, no matter what we do. They talked when this woman was in *sin*, they talked when she sacrificed herself in *worship*, they talked when Jesus *forgave* her sin. So many people have nothing better to do! It's why they and WE need Christ today.

Ultimately, I think we have a hard time because we forget **the reality that Jesus Christ is God**. He *is* the reality, no matter what *I* expected. He is not the escape from reality. *He* set up the rules of life. He set up the universe. His is the perfect design for relationships and how we relate to one another. He supplies my every need, including, when I really face up to it, my basic, raw, awful need for forgiveness—even the “unforgivable” parts that we can do nothing but confess.

So how do we respond this week? Some of you simply need to start by offering yourselves in worship of Christ, like this woman. Claim His forgiveness for the first time today, March 21st, 2010. Today is your day. Though it cost Jesus everything, today He offers it freely. Let your worship be your witness to your claim on God's forgiveness.

Others of you have already claimed your salvation in Jesus Christ, **but you find yourself identifying more with the host of the party than the surprise guest**. If that is you, For the sake of new life and the future, ARE YOU WILLING...to risk extravagance? Because we know what we know, we can afford to be extravagant. Ask God to free you to love Him extravagantly, and give to others extravagantly, and forgive them extravagantly, and forgive yourself extravagantly. Extravagant living looks like Mary & Jerry Black, who, though retired, aren't giving their lives away to golfing or touring, but to working behind the scenes—extravagantly, to make sure visitors have what they need in the gift bags, our soundboard is working. If you're retired, you have so much freedom to be extravagant! Extravagant living looks like Paul & Mims White, who work hard in outreach & hospitality here, as well as putting teams together to serve the homeless in Detroit. If you're an empty nester, you may have some extra freedom to serve God in special ways. Extravagant living looks like Mike & Jody Kinnard, who are seeking to help connect people to Christ by inviting them to church. If you're in the throes of raising kids, let God work in the unique opportunities & connections you have. It does take a village! If you're a youth, extravagant living is when you invite a friend to youth group; it's when you reach out to kids who don't have many friends. Risking extravagance looks generous, like the people who spend money not on themselves, but on ministry and missions, on resources like the Atrium and the Edge and new staff, in order that others would come to know the extravagant love of God, and in turn serve Him with all their powers.

Church, because we know what we know, we can afford to be extravagant. Our past is past. But what if our future came to be known as “the one who lived extravagantly for God and for others?” May it be so!

STUDY GUIDE

Luke 12 -16

Monday: Read Luke 12. Warnings & Encouragements (1-12). How do you feel knowing everything in secret will be revealed? When have you stood for Jesus in public and risked in a real way? The Parable of the Rich Fool (13-21). When have you been like this man? Is, or is not life more than your possessions? Don't Worry, be Watchful (22-48). On a scale of 1-10, what's the “worry quotient” in your life right now? What definitive act could you do to settle “Where your heart is” right now and for the rest of your life? Peace, Division, & the Times (49-59). What has Christ brought you: peace or division? What signs in your own life indicate how you're doing?

Tuesday: Read Luke 13. Current Events & A Crippled Woman Healed on the Sabbath (1-17). Like the fig tree, if you had “one more year” to turn your life around, what would you do? Start today! Parables of the Mustard Seed, Yeast, and the Narrow Door (18-30). When have you felt your faith was too small? How do you know you are inside or outside of the Kingdom? Jesus' Sorrow (31-35). What concerns you about your spiritual condition of your heart? The church? The nation?

Wednesday: Read Luke 14. Jesus at a Pharisee's House (1-14). Based on Jesus' teaching, who would you

invite to the party? Parable of the Great Banquet (15-24). Why do think so many people say “no” to God’s banquet? The Cost of Being a Disciple (25-35). Did you ever realize following Jesus is costly? How did you find out?

Thursday: Read Luke 15. The Gospel within the Gospel: Parables of the Lost Sheep, Coin, and Son. Just soak these in. Imagine—(v.5) the sinner lifted up by God Himself; and (v.20): God...on the neck of a sinner! And note the celebrations that ensue. Who are you most like?

Friday: Read Luke 16. The Parable of the Shrewd Manager (1-15). How are you with money? Is it yours, or God’s? Who (or what) masters have you served in the past? What masters scream for your alliance these days? The Rich Man & Lazarus (19-31). What is Jesus trying to show here?