

Jesus!
“The Connection Between Forgiveness and Love”
Luke 7:36-50

Take a first look.

I. WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT PATRICK OF IRELAND IS A MIXTURE OF HISTORY AND LEGEND, WE SUPPOSE TODAY. He allegedly drove all the snakes from the island and used the shamrock leaf to teach about the Trinity.

Unfortunately, along with many other good men and women and with many good events in history, St. Patrick's Day (March 17) is just another excuse to drink alcohol to excess and party. Green beer. When I was growing up, it was an occasion to wear green so that you wouldn't get pinched at school. What all of this has to do with the true Patrick of Ireland is a mystery.

What we do know about him with a greater measure of certainty is found in his *Confessio* (*Confession*). This was something of his spiritual autobiography, telling about both his early life, his conversion to true Christian faith, and his life of service to God.

He presents himself as a man of great self-awareness of sin, calling himself “this sinner.” He writes of the great grace of God that had brought him to serious faith in Christ and that also drew many Irish to faith in Him as well.

Do you remember some of the details of Patrick's story? Let me refresh your memory. He was a 16-year-old British youth when he was captured by Irish raiders and taken to Ireland. He was sold by these raiders to a cruel chieftain who neither fed him well nor allowed him much companionship. He went months at a time away from everyone, tending the flocks and herds of this cruel man. Patrick was a slave for six years. During this time, he began to seek the Lord in a serious manner. His family had been Christian, but he was only a nominal believer before his enslavement. He especially grew in the life of prayer.

Near the end of those six long years, God gave him a vision that indicated he would be free and would return home. He did escape, traveling the 200 miles to the coast and catching a boat back to continental Europe, probably near the coast of France.

Some years after he made his way home to Britain, he had another vision, something akin to the Macedonian vision of Paul. Patrick saw and heard an Irishman. In his words, “I had a vision in my dreams of a man who seemed to come from Ireland. His name was Victoricius, and he carried countless letters, one of which he handed over to me. I read aloud where it began: ‘The Voice of the Irish.’ And as I began to read these words, I seemed to hear the voice of the same men who lived beside the forest of Foclut ... and they cried out as with one voice, ‘We appeal to you, holy servant boy, to come and walk among us.’ I was deeply moved in heart and I could read no further, so I awoke.”¹

Patrick had come to understand profoundly his own sinfulness, to recognize how great God's grace toward sinful people really is, and to humble himself before the Lord. Because of this, he was ready to respond to this call from God. He went to Ireland, even though he and many others considered his education inadequate, even though he remained keenly aware of his faults and failings. When he went, he saw God use his humble efforts to win thousands to Christ. Some estimate that 120,000 people were baptized under his ministry alone.

¹ *Christian History*, Fall, 1998.

II. PATRICK UNDERSTOOD THE CONNECTION BETWEEN A PROFOUND EXPERIENCE OF FORGIVENESS AND THE EXPRESSION OF LOVE TOWARD THE LORD IN THE SERVANT-LIFE.

In the story of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we meet another woman, nameless in the account of Luke, who understood this connection well. She demonstrated the truth that Jesus stated well, “The one who has been forgiven much will love much in return.”

Take a closer look at Luke 7:36-50.

I. A TRUE EXPERIENCE OF GOD’S FORGIVENESS WILL INSPIRE ACTIONS OF LOVE.

1. A woman with a bad reputation slipped in while Jesus was reclining at the table in a Pharisee named Simon’s house. This was perhaps a routine engagement for Jesus. He was a traveling rabbi, an itinerant preacher, a celebrity by now because of all the people who were following Him wherever He went. We are not told what the motivation of this Pharisee was. Was he trying to find out personal information that could be used to discredit his radical preaching? Was he a true seeker trying to get closer to this man with the powerful presence and message?

Whatever the case, it was a private meal. Picture the scene. Everyone is reclining around a table that is probably about 1 ½ feet off the ground. The dinner guests are most likely leaning on cushions like pillows on their left arms with their feet out behind them. It was in this position that the woman was able to approach Jesus’ feet while He was “reclined at the table.”

The woman is described in a brief but telling manner as “a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town” (v. 37). She heard that Jesus was in town and crept in and stood behind His feet weeping. This is not the same woman who is described in the other gospel accounts as anointing Jesus with perfume. Those all describe an event in the last week of His human life. Luke’s account happens much earlier. Though the name is the same in Matthew and Mark, we must recognize that Simon was a very common name at that time, and that this would have been a different man with the same name.

2. The woman shed tears over Jesus’ feet, dried them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. This woman could not keep her love for Jesus to herself. Apparently, she had already come to believe in Him and had found a sense of release from her former life: genuine forgiveness. Now she acted on that sense of forgiveness. She came and worshipped at Jesus’ feet.

A— Any of us who have truly found the forgiveness of our sins through Jesus Christ can’t help acting on that new freedom from condemnation.

I—It is the power of Jesus’ action on our behalf that now moves us to be reconciled both to God and to each other. It is the power of His sacrifice that compels us to live differently.

Tells David Slagle, “On January 26, 2001, Seiko Sakamoto, a plasterer working in a Tokyo subway station, fell into the path of an oncoming train. Lee Su Hyun, a Korean student in Japan for language studies, leaped down on the tracks to save Sakamoto. Both Hyun and Sakamoto were unable to exit the path of the oncoming train and were killed.

“This selfless act by the Korean student on behalf of the Japanese laborer has caused many people in Japan to reconsider their long-held prejudices directed toward Koreans. Strong feelings of distrust between the two countries go back to World War II atrocities inflicted upon Koreans by the Japanese. Many Japanese people, including the Prime Minister of Japan, have

openly expressed sorrow over their previously held stereotypes of Koreans and have begun to talk about reconciliation. Nobuaki Fujioka, a 62-year-old Japanese said, 'I felt a kind of shame. A young foreigner sacrificed his life for a Japanese. This is not an easy thing to do.'"

Slagle draws the parallel: "Reconciliation rarely occurs without sacrifice. By giving his one and only Son, God took the initiative in healing our broken relationship with him. He made the supreme sacrifice for us that we might be reconciled to him."²

When we truly understand what Jesus has done for us in His death and resurrection and when we enter into the forgiveness offered on that basis, we cannot keep from expressing the love that grows in our hearts through action.

II. A TRUE EXPERIENCE OF GOD'S FORGIVENESS WILL CHALLENGE ATTITUDES OF PREJUDICE.

1. *Simon held the woman in contempt and thought Jesus should have recognized what kind of woman she was.* Simon couldn't believe that a true "prophet" would allow a woman of such a sinful past to touch him. The Greek text has a construction in the "if" clause that shows that this Pharisee believed that Jesus certainly was *not* a prophet. It is called the "second class" condition, which assumes, from the speaker's standpoint, that the statement is not true. "If (and I don't believe it) this man were a prophet..."

Jesus, as usual, demonstrates that He is surely more than a prophet and reads his mind. He anticipates anything Simon may have later said aloud regarding the situation.

2. *Jesus told a short parable to illustrate the relationship between forgiveness and love.* The parable was a little story with a question. Two men owed money to the same lender, one a huge amount that could barely be earned in 1 ½ to 2 years, the other an amount that could be earned in a couple of months. Neither had the money to repay the debts, and the lender forgave the debts of both. The question: "Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered with some hesitation, perhaps sensing a setup and a teaching moment, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled." "I suppose." Jesus then made application of the story to the present contrast between Simon and the "sinful" woman.

3. *The contrast between Simon's actions and those of the woman illustrate the difference between those who feel forgiven of little and those who feel forgiven of much.* Note the contrast of action and inaction. The sinful woman came into this strict religious person's house at great social and physical risk. She wet Jesus' feet with her tears, kissed His feet, poured expensive perfume on them, and dried them with her hair. In contrast, the Pharisee bypassed social convention and didn't even provide Jesus with water for his feet, didn't even greet Him with the customary kiss, and further didn't provide any oil for His head, the word meaning *olive oil*, cheap and readily available. The contrast was sharp and to the heart of the matter.

"For she loved much" is *evidence* of her forgiveness, not the cause of it. Love doesn't yield forgiveness. It is the other way around. Once a person recognizes just how much he or she has been forgiven, it is not possible to contain the love that will be shown as a result.

A—Have we come to recognize how great the forgiveness of Jesus for each of us? Are we showing it in our actions in Jesus' name?

² David A. Slagle, Lawrenceville, GA; source: from article in the *Washington Post*, by Shigehiko Togo and Doug Struck with Joohee Cho.

I—When we recognize the darkness that lies in our own souls, that this darkness can only be explained from a Christian interpretation of what it means to be human, we are driven to Christ in grateful faith and love. John Yenchko tells how W. H. Auden, a 20th-century Pulitzer Prize winning poet, playwright, and literary critic was converted:

“Auden saw a movie in 1940 produced by Hitler’s Third Reich. It followed the invasion and Blitzkrieg through Poland. Called *Psyche in Poland*, and it was the propaganda piece of their victory. Many Germans who had immigrated to the United States were sitting in the theater. Whenever a Polish person [appeared] on the screen, usually led by a German, people in the audience would scream, ‘Kill him! Kill him!’ in a frenzied commitment to the destruction of Germany’s enemies.

“Auden, this magnificent, wonderful, European, enlightened intellectual, was so shocked that he walked out of the theater.

“He later said one question ran through his mind: ‘What response can my enlightened, humanistic tradition give to this evil, to those who cry out for the blood of innocent victims?’ He saw the bankruptcy of humanism. He began to sense that the only answer to evil would be found in God and the revelation of God in the Bible. He was convicted of God’s holiness and his own sinfulness. In 1940 he became a Christian.”³

III. A TRUE EXPERIENCE OF GOD’S FORGIVENESS CAN COME THROUGH JESUS CHRIST. Vv. 48-50

1. *Jesus spoke the word of forgiveness to the woman, based on the faith she expressed in her actions.* “Go into peace,” Jesus literally said to her. Leon Morris tells us⁴ that the rabbis believed that the proper manner of bidding farewell to the dead was “Go in peace,” but that to the living one should say, “Go into peace.” Now that she had put her faith in Jesus, had experienced His forgiveness and the burst of love in her soul for Him as a result, she could truly go forth and live in the peace of God with a new life.

2. *This stirred up the other quests to question Jesus authority to forgive sins.* This became a growing hostility against Him that finally gave birth to their murderous actions toward Him.

A—Here is the offense of the cross. As the Apostle Peter came to state it: “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12, NIV).

I—Denny Rydberg, the president of Young Life some years ago, told the following story in a ministry letter back in 1999.

“It was the first night of camp, and a group of tough kids from the city had hardly unpacked when the leaders received word about a theft. A work crew kid was missing a wallet, \$35, and a watch. The next morning, Kirk, the intern from the city, found the empty wallet in his cabin. He immediately called his guys together and hit them with the hard facts.

“‘Man, you guys did exactly what society expected you to do. You just proved them right. And it’s a shame. Now you’ve got 20 minutes to produce that money and the watch, or we’re all going home.’ Kirk walked out and shut the door. He could hear the guys shouting at one another and scrambling around inside the cabin. In a moment, the door opened again, and the

³ John Yenchko, “Hell,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* (Fall 2000), p. 48; submitted by Aaron Goerner, New Hartford, New York, to Preaching Today.

⁴ See his comments in *Luke* in Tyndale New Testament Commentaries.

toughest kid in the crowd presented Kirk with the \$35 and the watch. The money was already spent, but the kids had emptied their pockets and pooled their cash.

“When the staff person came to pick up the stolen goods, someone asked, ‘Who did it?’ Kirk replied, ‘We all did it. We’re all guilty. We’re in this together.’ The kids were shocked by Kirk’s display of solidarity. Then he shut the cabin door and started to preach.

“‘Let’s talk about grace,’ he said to the silent cabin. ‘Grace is getting something you don’t deserve. God is going to correct you, but he’s going to forgive you. Jesus is going to break you, but he’s going to remake you. We all deserve to go home, but we’re going to get to stay.’ It was only the first morning of camp, but God already had the undivided attention of 17 tough guys from the city.

“A few nights later, Kirk invited the work crew kid who had been robbed to come to his cabin and to share his own experience of God’s grace with the guys. After the young man left that night, Kirk said, ‘Now I’m going to say a prayer, and if any of you want to pray with me and give your lives to God, then just do it.’ By the end of the prayer, 17 baritone voices had cried out to Jesus Christ.”⁵

The issue of grace is this: we all deserve to go home.

Take it home (questions for discussion and application).

I. Let’s take an honest, personal moment right now. God has poured out His own love toward us, “in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). How should that shape our self-image? How should it shape our view of other people?

II. How did we find that love and forgiveness for ourselves? What did it take to get us there?

III. How is the grace shown to us in Jesus Christ affecting our relationships with others? Can we think of at least one person toward whom we need to point that grace, forgiveness and love? How might we do so?

⁵ Denny Rydberg, president of Young Life, from October 1999 ministry letter, Preaching Today.