

**The Main Thing, Part 1:
“Love the Lord Your God” | Luke 7:36-50**

Hello HMCC family! I trust you are ready now for the ministry of God’s word. We’re going to get right into it. We’re starting a brand-new series today called “The Main Thing,” and so let me explain what we mean by this.

Kevin DeYoung wrote in his book that he wrote called *Crazy Busy*. He said this:

“Whether you are a pastor, a parent, or a pediatrician, you likely struggle with the crushing weight of work, family, exercise, bills, church, school friends, and a barrage of requests, demands, and desires. No doubt, some people are quantitatively less busy than others and some much more so, but that doesn’t change the shared experience: most everyone I know feels frazzled and overwhelmed most of the time....

“We are here and there and everywhere. We are distracted. We are preoccupied. We can’t focus on the task in front of us. We don’t follow through. We don’t keep our commitments. We are so busy with a million pursuits that we don’t even notice the most important things slipping away.”

Does that describe you? Can you relate with some of these things that he says here? Well, in life where many things are competing to be the main thing, we have to be on the alert to “keep the main thing the main thing.” So what is the main thing? I would say in a word, it is: love (1 Cor. 13:13). The scriptures say that if we have and do everything else, but we don’t have love, we are nothing and we gain nothing (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

But love is not simply what we have, it is also what we express: we love vertically toward the Lord our God and we love horizontally toward our neighbor and these two are directly connected. Love is the main thing that always must be kept the main thing.

In this two-part sermon series, “The Main Thing,” we’ll see how love must be kept as the main thing in our lives, expressed in God’s two great commandments. This week in part 1 it will be “Love the Lord your God,” and next Sunday in part 2 it will be “Love Your Neighbor.”

Let’s go ahead and read today’s text of Scripture:

Luke 7:36-50 (ESV):

36 One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. 37 And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, 38 and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. 39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.” 40 And Jesus answering said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” And he answered, “Say it, Teacher.” 41 “A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?” 43 Simon answered, “The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.” And he said to him, “You have judged rightly.” 44 Then 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 from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. 46 You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. 47 Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.” 48 And he said to her, “Your sins are

forgiven.” 49 Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this, who even forgives sins?” 50 And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

The “one thing” of Luke 7:36-50:

Believing Jesus forgives much causes us to love much.

There’s three questions that are posed in this narrative that will frame how I preach today:

The three questions:

1. **“Who is this Jesus?” (36-39)**
2. **“Who loves more?” (40-47)**
3. **“Who forgives sins?” (48-50)**

I’m also going to be sharing a handful of timeless truths that I interpreted from this narrative as well and I’ll share them as we step through these three questions.

But before we go on any further, let’s pray and ask for God’s grace to listen and take in his Word into our hearts today. Let’s pray.

Heavenly Father, as we receive your Word right now, may you confront us with our sins, may you lead us to repentance and receive more of your grace, and cause us to make the main thing in our lives to love you with all of our hearts, minds, souls, and strength. In Jesus’ name we give you this time, Amen.

Let’s go to the first question: **“Who is this Jesus?” (36-39).**

People were asking this question, “Who is this?” throughout Luke chapter 7. Let’s first put this narrative in its proper context. In Luke 7:34, it was said that the people were actually accusing Jesus of being a “glutton” and being a “drunkard” and being a friend of tax collectors and sinners. But it’s also recorded that Jesus was doing some amazing things as well in chapter 7.

He had healed a centurion’s servant who was very sick; he raised the son of a widow back from the dead; and he testified to John the Baptist and his disciples that through him the blind were able to see, the lame were able to walk, the lepers were made cleaned, and the deaf were able to hear, and the good news was being proclaimed to the poor.

So the question that kept coming up was that question, “Who is this Jesus?” Was he the promised King, the promised Messiah (Jews referred to the promised King as the “Messiah” or as the “Christ”)? Or was this Jesus a mere fraud? Was he someone that, like many others that have come before, that claimed, made these grand claims but actually was not. This narrative that we’re in today addresses these questions. It’s how some concluded that he was a fraud, and how others concluded that he actually was the Promised King.

I want to mention truth #1 at this point:

It is that people can be characterized as “religious” or “non-religious” and this is from verses 36-39.

The first main character is identified here only as “the Pharisee” in verse 36. Let me spend some time describing what a “Pharisee” would be like. This meant that he was part of a very special, and attractive, and popular group of Jews called the Pharisees. They were well-known for sticking with very strict interpretations of the Law and their traditions- especially things regarding purity laws, things like washing and eating and tithing, and observing the Sabbath. They were people who could say to some degree of honesty that they loved

God. They loved God. They loved his law. So, perhaps in this Pharisee's mind, he would say, "That's why I'm so strict about washing, and eating, and tithing, and observing the Sabbath- it is because I love God."

This particular Pharisee invited Jesus to a banquet in his own home. Usually what happened after a synagogue service was somebody would host a meal after and people would gather together at someone's home. It seems like this particular banquet was a banquet where Jesus was the "guest of honor." The Pharisee hosted this meal with Jesus so that he and his friends could get to know Jesus a bit better and to figure out who he really was- was he really a prophet, at the very least, or was he, at the best, was he the Messiah! Was he the Christ? This Pharisee was "cautious but hopeful" in this way.

The second main character was introduced in verse 37, it's this "woman" and she is unkindly portrayed as someone who had a reputation in the town as a "sinner." That means that she was probably either a prostitute or someone who had a very shady, promiscuous reputation with men among that town. She managed to get in the banquet, she did that because usually outsiders were allowed into those kinds of gatherings and they were only allowed to stay against the walls just so that they could listen to the conversations. All the important people would be at the table eating and talking away together.

This woman did not follow the social norms, however, so instead, she created quite an awkward situation at that banquet.

Jesus would have most likely been sitting something like the people here in this picture where they would be leaning on one arm and kind of leaning in, sitting on the floor with their feet kind of pointed out. What this woman did, if you just imagine with me. This woman didn't stand along the fringes, she actually came up close behind Jesus and just stood there right behind him. And then maybe sometime during that meal, she began to weep uncontrollably- so much that her tears were flowing and getting Jesus' feet wet- and as they were getting wet, what she did was her hair was not tied up or covered as holy women would. It was loose and she went down on her knees and she started drying Jesus' feet with her hair. And as she was doing that, she decided to she shower Jesus' feet with her kisses and she rubbed his feet with this expensive oil of perfume. This was quite a scene here, wasn't it! It's obvious here that this woman had made her own conclusions about Jesus as well.

But for the Pharisee, going back to him. His hopeful expectations of Jesus, at this scene, were dashed into pieces. He said in verse 39: "If Jesus was even a prophet or some special "holy man," then he would know for sure that this woman was a sinner and he would not allow this kind of woman to be so close to him." He was waiting for the promised King- righteous and just- who would lead the people of Israel out of Roman oppression and into this glorious kingdom. He had it in his mind what that person would be like and Jesus was not that person.

I want to repeat truth #1 again that people can be characterized as "religious" or "non-religious" (36-39) and I think there are some of us who are "religious"- which can be both good and bad. The good is that in some ways you are naturally inclined to be moral, and spiritual, and you have a high standard for yourselves. In fact, you might be inclined to be interested in God, and have a natural respect for him. You have a desire to please him, and you have a desire to go to things like church and participate in church. The bad can be that you can be judgmental towards others that don't match up to you and who can be easily labeled as "not good" (by whatever markers that you deem someone as "not good"). You can become proud about your goodness or you can be someone who maybe is not proud because of your goodness, or you might become frustrated at yourself or even depressed if you fall short of your own expectations in some way.

I also think that there are some of us who are "non-religious"- which can be also good and bad. The good is that you are inclined to think differently and to challenge the status quo. You strive to be real and authentic- even if it means exposing more of your personal life to others. The bad, however, can be that you can also be judgmental towards there people who may seem more close-minded or traditional than you. You might have

been a “religious” person, but now you’re “non-religious.” You quit because you could not or you did not want to meet up to certain standards. You may still feel judged, you may still struggle with feelings of guilt as well.

Do any of these descriptions hit home for you? Honestly for me, I can fluctuate between the two, although I would have to say I’m more naturally a “religious” person. In this narrative, both kinds of people- religious or non-religious- are strangely drawn and curious about Jesus. Jesus makes himself available to both types of people. Both have opportunities to make conclusions about Jesus as well. And so that’s the first question that’s posed (“Who is this Jesus?”).

We’re seeing how two people answered that question, and how they came up to their own conclusions. And we’ll see now why they come to the conclusions that they do in this second question.

The second question is: **“Who loves more?” (40-47)**

Jesus had something to say to the Pharisee to address his blind spot. So here’s Truth #2:
We must realize that we cannot truly love God by our own will (40-43).

Luke 7:40-43 (ESV): 40 And Jesus answering said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” And he answered, “Say it, Teacher.” 41 “A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?” 43 Simon answered, “The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.” And he said to him, “You have judged rightly.”

When you look at these verses you see that Jesus shared this short parable in vv. 41 - 42 specifically. And just to summarise the parable, there was a moneylender, and there were two debtors. One person owed 500 Denarii which is about 20 months worth of wages. The other person owed 50 denarii which is about 2 months worth of wages. And so the moneylender canceled the debt of both. I want to emphasize two very important facts from this little parable. First, is that both people owed a debt that they were not able to repay. It didn’t matter the amount. Both owed a debt that they were not able to repay. The second, is that the moneylender canceled both debts, both amounts; the 50 and the 500 were both canceled.

When Jesus asked which of them will love him more, he was simply saying that love can be looked at as an intensity of gratitude and appreciation for this act of grace. And the answer to this question that the Pharisee answered was obvious. The one whose debt is greater would feel a greater intensity of gratitude and appreciation. But remember that both were unable to repay their debts, both were forgiven of their debts, and both of them experienced grace.

Now I want to pause here and ask you, did you notice that this Pharisee’s name is not actually mentioned until vv. 40 - 43? It’s like Jesus knows this Pharisee by name and here, as he addresses his mistake, compassionately addresses him personally. So while Simon the Pharisee - this “religious” person- thought that he loved God, Jesus had to inform him that indeed, he was a sinner, he was also a debtor to God as well. No amount of keeping the Law and traditions could shake it; in fact, the very Law that he treasured was proof that he could not love God enough. The sinful nature that was inside him would always choose to love self rather than love God.

This is how Paul, in the New Testament, described the relationship between the law and all people (including Simon the Pharisee):

Romans 7:14 (NLT): 14 So the trouble is not with the law, for it is spiritual and good. The trouble is with me, for I am all too human, a slave to sin.

The Law reflects the holiness of God. The law reflects how holy and righteous and good God is. And it also at the same time exposes our sinfulness that is deep inside of us. Even if we have a “religious” heart for God, our sinful nature sabotages us, as Paul continues...

Romans 7:18-19 (NLT): 18 And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. 19 I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway.

My family, during this pandemic, (among many other projects) one fun project that we have is: working our way through the Star Wars movies. Fun projects, right? We just finished “Revenge of the Sith” which is Episode 3, and it is such a tragic story. There's a range of people - I hope that most of you have watched this - there is a range of feelings towards the newer Star Wars movies. I just have to say that it is such a tragic story.

Just as a refresher, the first three episodes of the Star Wars series is basically an origin story about Darth Vader. Once again, sorry, this is a spoiler alert. It focuses on Anakin Skywalker, how he ended up becoming, probably one of the most famous bad guys in movie history, he becomes Darth Vader). In short, Anakin Skywalker loved this woman named Padme. He loved her so much that his anger towards others became uncontrollable - whenever he felt that others threatened her, that anger became so uncontrollable in him. In fact he had this premonition or this dream that Padme would die in childbirth so he made this vow that he would do whatever he could in his power to prevent that from happening. That's how much he loves or he thought he loves Padme. What ends up happening is Anakin's “dark side” is what actually sabotages him and he ends up getting turned to the dark side. He breaks Padme's heart, he becomes Darth Vader, and she died while giving birth to their children. You see how Anakin's dark side actually sabotages his love for Padme, breaks her heart, and ends up destroying him and her.

Friends, we must realize that we cannot truly love God by our own will! In fact, we think we love God by being “religious,” but our sinful natures always sabotage any form of love we have for God- and that sinful nature will end up destroying us as well. The truth is, we must see that there is actually no such thing as being “forgiven little” in God's economy- we have all been forgiven much. Jesus paid with his life for our seriously fatal debt of sin! We may have different levels of “badness” of sins relative to other human beings, but sin before God is so offensive that God had to give his Son to bear his wrath for those sins. We have all been forgiven much. Let's go to Truth #3:

Truth #3: Authentic love for God is possible- it is real, joyful, and liberating (44-47).

Luke 7:44-47 (ESV): 44 Then 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 from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. 46 You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. 47 Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.”

Now in these verses, Jesus finally turns his attention to the woman. He commended her beautiful expression of love for him. While Simon seemed to keep Jesus at an arm's length while he came to his conclusions about who Jesus was, this woman was so different. It says - as you remember that, and he noticed that too - that she wet Jesus' feet with her tears. That's how much of an outpouring of emotion came out of her. She wiped them with her hair. She was that humble that she used her hair to wipe his feet. She could not stop kissing his feet and she brought that perfume to anoint his feet.

Her actions showed undeniable love! This woman was obviously passionate. We have to know that emotions are legitimate and indicate what the desires of a person's hearts really is. She was emotional because Jesus had

met the desire in her heart. She was emotional because her conclusions about Jesus were hitting that deepest part of her heart. I also think that she was thoughtful. She entered Simon's house with the intention to honor and appreciate Jesus. She had to think about it. She heard this news, but she didn't go straight to Simon's house. She stopped by her house and she looked for her secret stash where she had been saving all of her money, and saving this expensive perfume so that she can take it and bring it to Jesus. She had to make her way into the home and into the meal. She had to consider all of the backlash that she would receive for doing what she was doing. She had to muster up the courage to actually follow through and act upon it.

This is where I want to park a bit. Because what I want to emphasize about this woman's response to Jesus is that she was authentic. We see her passion. We see her thoughtfulness. She did see her great debt of sin (no one else needed to point it out to her or help her remember); she did see her need to be forgiven of her debt of sins (because she had a lot). She saw Jesus as the one that God sent to forgive people like her from her sins. Her response was this deep gratitude. Her response was this overwhelming joy that just came out. It was a compulsion to be close to him. It was this worship without self-consciousness. It was this courage in the midst of difficult decisions and against popular opinion. It's amazing, it's beautiful.

No one would say that this kind of authenticity is bad- in fact, it really is to be admired, it really is to be desired. But in the same way that the sinful nature of a "religious" person sabotages their love for God; the sinful nature of a "non-religious" person sabotages their desire to be authentic because we can't help but preserve ourselves. We can't help but be self-conscious. We can't help be fearful and controlled of what others think about us.

It's like the phenomenon of, "Whatever you do, don't think about a pink elephant." "Ok, Andrew, don't think about a pink elephant. Don't think about a pink elephant." You know what happens when we keep saying "Don't think about a pink elephant"? What ends up happening, inevitably is we're thinking about the pink elephant! When we're focused on being authentic on our own, we only end up trying to preserve ourselves. We only end up getting more and more self-conscious. We only end up more and more fearful of what others think about us!

In fact, "non-religious" people do have the same problem as "religious" people here. We cannot truly be authentic by our own will. But we do see that authentic love for God is possible- it can be real, it can be joyful, it can be liberating! That's what this woman experienced, that's what Jesus affirmed in her.

So we've covered the questions, "Who is Jesus?" and "Who loves more?" We realize that we cannot truly love God or be authentic on our own will. So how can we become authentic? How can we truly love God? It leads to the third question in this narrative...

"Who forgives sins?" (48-50)

Jesus said three profoundly important statements to this woman here.

Truth #4: Repenting leads to receiving forgiveness by faith which leads to authentic love (48-50).

Luke 7:48-50 (ESV): 48 And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." 49 Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" 50 And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

First, Jesus said to this woman in v. 48, "Your sins are forgiven." Again, the people at the table- Simon the Pharisee and his friends - all were wondering, "Who is this guy? Who is this guy who even forgives sins?" So this Jesus, who had been healing the blind, lame, leprous, and deaf and had been proclaiming good news to the poor, he was also forgiving sins. In fact, what I would say is that the ultimate mission of the true Messiah - the

“Servant King” was to forgive sins. That’s what we learned in the book of Isaiah. Let me read Isaiah 53:10-11 (NLT) that talks about this as the ultimate mission of the “Servant King”.

Isaiah 53:10-11 (NLT): 10 But it was the Lord’s good plan to crush him and cause him grief. Yet when his life is made an offering for sin, he will have many descendants. He will enjoy a long life, and the Lord’s good plan will prosper in his hands. 11 When he sees all that is accomplished by his anguish, he will be satisfied. And because of his experience, my righteous servant will make it possible for many to be counted righteous, for he will bear all their sins.

It was God’s plan was to “crush” Jesus on the cross- to give his life as the definitive and final sacrifice to pay the debt of sins for all who would believe in this message. Those who do believe will be made forever right with God and they will inherit eternal life. This is a gift, given completely by God’s grace to all who would receive it. This is who Jesus was to this woman!

Second, Jesus said in v. 50, “Your faith has saved you.” It wasn’t her actions at that scene that saved her. It is clear that she was saved from her sins by God’s grace alone through Jesus’ ministry of forgiveness which we know via the cross. Remember no one of God’s forgiveness is “little”; we have all been forgiven much. But she received that gift by faith. She knew her great debt, she knew her need, and she saw Jesus’ great sacrifice of love by giving his very life! She was saved by faith alone in God’s grace in Jesus ministry of forgiveness.

Friends, faith is simply receiving a gift that God wants to give to you. Let’s imagine that there was a pandemic even worse than COVID-19- a fatal virus that everyone was infected with. Let’s imagine that Bill Gates and Elon Musk combine forces and fund billions of dollars for scientists to create a 100% effective- fully tested, fully approved- cure for this virus. It would be available for everyone for free. They just need to receive that shot. Now the difference between people in this situation, who would live and and who would die, would simply be people who would trust in that cure and would receive that shot. That is saving faith. The difference between people whose sins are forgiven and those whose sins are not, is if we trust in Jesus as the only cure for our sins.

Third, Jesus said in v. 51, “Go in peace,” and I love this! There are two layers of this that I want to mention. The first layer is that Jesus told this woman that she could live her life now fully confident that Jesus had forgiven her sins- paid once for all on the cross. She would certainly still sin on this side of heaven, but she could always be confident that she and God are forever at peace because of Jesus. That outpouring of authentic love- expressed in affection, gratitude, and worship- could be how she always related to God. She could believe that by faith, she could be authentic at that moment but she could also be authentic throughout her life because of Jesus’ ministry of forgiveness!

The second layer to “Go in peace” is an issue of direction. A life of forgiveness, faith, and love would lead to a constant life of repentance. And take note of this: repentance isn’t, “Woe is me I stink at life, God hates me” thing. Repentance is actually a joyful catalyst in growing love for God.

Here’s what I mean. During our lives on earth we will continue to sin as believers. We won’t be without our sinful nature until heaven. So left on our own we’ll slip back into a religious or non-religious mindset. But when we acknowledge our sins again and again, we repent- which is turning away from that sin and turning towards Jesus by faith. And then what happens when we repent is we experience the accepting, costly, sacrificial, committed, stunning love of God again in our lives. We would sin again, and again, and again actually.

This is what we do in Sunday Celebration every week. It’s not because we worry whether our sins from that past week are forgiven or not. But when we do our confession of sin, and confession of faith, it is an exercising of faith: where repenting leads to receiving forgiveness by faith which leads to authentic love. We are

reminded that we have been forgiven much, and that leads to gratitude, and affection and worship from our hearts. It becomes real, it becomes joyful, and it becomes liberating in our lives! Sunday Celebration is an opportunity for that to happen and for that to be reinforced and then to be lived out everyday in our walks with God.

Then we will truly love God more and more. We will want to obey his words; we will hate sin and fight it so that we honor God. And we will be truly authentic as well more and more: we will be honest and transparent with others about our struggles; we will not be so judgmental towards others; we will not be captive to pleasing others; we can truly forget about ourselves. The main thing- of loving God- stays the main thing!

So we've talked about the three questions raised here: "Who is this Jesus?", "Who loves more?", and "Who forgives sins?" Jesus, the promised King would be the one who paid for our debts on the cross. And as we repent of our sins, we experience his forgiveness that we receive by faith, and that leads us to love the Lord our God more and more authentically.

Believing Jesus forgives us much causes us to love him much.

Conclusion

I. Life Application

What are the next steps that we can take as a "life application" from today's sermon?

1. Take advantage of opportunities when we see that we are sinners to catalyze this process of repentance by faith and receiving forgiveness by faith that leads to loving God more.
 - a) Have you ever been caught red-handed in sin? Thank God for that! Are you struggling because you see the shortcomings and failures in your life? Take advantage of that, to dig deeper into your heart so that you could see the sins that lie deep within. Are you in situations that are bringing the worst out of you, at work, at home, on campus? Consider this an opportunity to experience how Jesus forgives much so that we can love him much!
 - b) Imagine if we were a church community that lived like this! We could help each other "live in the Gospel" by walking through these opportunities when we see that we're sinners: we repent together by faith, receive forgiveness by faith together; and we love God more together. Our gatherings- life group gatherings and Sunday celebrations- will be on fire!
 - c) Imagine how great a demonstration of the Gospel this would be to those around us! We love God much because we've been forgiven much- and this gift is available for everyone! We won't judge others as "sinners"; we'll be authentic in how we share and open up with others. Believing Jesus forgives us much, which causes us to love him much, it becomes such a great testimony to our world!

We'll go back live to our SC for our time of response now.