



- Introduction: Children's Letters to God
- Dear God: Thank you for the baby brother, but what I prayed for was a puppy. - Joyce
- Dear God: Is it true my father won't get in Heaven if he uses his bowling words in the house? -Anita
- Dear God: Did you really mean "do unto others as they do unto you?" Because if you did, then I'm going to fix my brother. -Darla
- Dear God: I bet it is very hard for You to love all of everybody in the whole world. There are only 4 people in our family and I can never do it. -Nan
- Dear God: My brother told me about being born but it doesn't sound right. They're just kidding, aren't they? -Marsha
- Dear God: I didn't think orange went with purple until I saw the sunset you made on Tuesday. That was cool! -Eugene
- Dear God: In school they told us what You do. Who does it when You are on vacation? -Jane
- Dear God: Did you mean for the giraffe to look like that or was it an accident? - Norma
- Dear God: Instead of letting people die and having to make new ones, why don't You just keep the ones You have now? -Jane
- Dear God: I read the Bible. What does begat mean? Nobody will tell me. Love, Alison

I find it fascinating to see what kids will put in a letter to God. Through their letters they come with the opportunity to ask Him or tell Him absolutely anything at all. And in light of that golden opportunity, what do they do? Well, they ask Him what "begat" means or if the giraffe was an accident... and it is adorable.

However, you and I cannot remain in that simple stage of life forever, and, if we are wise, we will take full advantage of every opportunity this life affords to draw near to Jesus Christ. Indeed, we have that very opportunity this morning, even as we have it every day we draw breath. And if our lives are going to be transformed for the glory of God, then we must not only come to Christ, but we must realize how He wants us to come. And that idea leads us to **the Big Idea** of this morning's message, which is this: **How we come to Christ will determine whether or not we are truly changed by Him.**

-- Read Luke 7:36-50

-- Pray

As I have been meditating upon this text, it has occurred to me that the best way for us to understand it this morning—over the next two weeks in fact—is for me to preach it somewhat backwards. That is, I am going to begin today by looking at the end of the passage and end by examining the beginning. In keeping with that strategy, then, will you please read with me again the last few verses of our text, and as we do, take note of how vastly differently this encounter ends for the sinful woman Jesus versus the way it turns out for Simon the Pharisee. Read with me beginning in verse 44:

Then [Jesus] turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? 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. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little." Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

First, take note of the difference between the two individuals involved in this encounter with Jesus. Simon was a Pharisee, which meant that he was considered an expert in the Scriptures and a religious leader of the Jews. The word "Pharisee" itself means, "set apart," and that is how the Jews of Jesus' day viewed them—as high and mighty men set above ordinary Jews of the day. What is more, many Pharisees quite arrogantly viewed themselves in the same way. Simon lived in a fine home that was likely filled with servants, and he served fine foods to fine guests while reclining at his fine table on fine occasions.

The woman in question, however, was unrefined at best. In fact, our text indicates that she was, in fact, notorious in her town for her sinfulness. Verse 37 says as much by describing her as “*a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town.*” Inasmuch as Simon the Pharisee would have been that society’s picture of holiness, this woman was the epitome of unrighteousness.

Second, notice how the actions of each one revealed the degree of their affection for Jesus. Whereas Simon’s actions revealed him to be apathetic about even the most common courtesies of the day, the woman in our text did all she could to demonstrate her love for Christ. Simon had neglected the simple hospitality of offering Jesus some water to wash His feet and a towel to dry them, yet the woman had such fondness for our Lord in her heart that she washed His feet with tears of sincere repentance and dried them with her own hair. He had failed to greet Jesus with the customary kiss on the cheek, yet she bowed down and repeatedly kissed His feet. Simon had bypassed the kind gesture of anointing the head of his guest with fragrant oil. This woman, on the other hand, lavishly poured extravagant perfume on His feet.

Third, look at the two dramatically different outcomes of this encounter upon the lives of Simon and this sinful woman. Even though they both met with the same Jesus in the same place and at the same time the effects upon their lives can scarcely be overstated. For example, whereas the woman was absolved by Christ, Simon’s guilt remained. Whereas Christ commended the woman’s loving actions as authentic evidence of the faith that had saved her, He informed Simon, who was a religious leader, how little he really loved God. Whereas Jesus rescued the woman from a life of sin that was headed for hell, Simon yet remained on that dreadful path, dead in his sins and separated from the life of God. Let me ask you: Could there possibly be two more different people with two more diametrically opposite outcomes?

Thus, as the reality of the great disparity between Simon and this woman sinks into our hearts, we are blessed to ask this: Why is there such a profound discrepancy between these two people? In other words, why was this sinful woman’s life so monumentally and eternally transformed by the very same encounter with Jesus Christ that only seemed to harden Simon’s heart? This is an excellent question to ask, because just as Jesus forever transformed this wayward woman in to a masterpiece of His magnificent mercy, so He desires to do the same in your heart and in mine. And if we would be gloriously changed by Jesus Christ—like the woman in our text—and not gravely unaffected by Him—like

Simon the Pharisee—then we must learn from our text how it is that we should to come to Christ. That is to say that, **to be truly transformed for Christ we must come to Him in at least four critical ways**, the first of which is this: We must...

1.) Come unassuming.

As we continue to move backwards through our text, will you please read with me verses 40 through 43, where Jesus responds to Simon's inner thoughts by telling what we know as "The Parable of the Two Debtors":

Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you. Tell me, teacher," he said. "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 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?" Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

Jesus uses this parable here to reveal yet another critical difference between the woman in our text and Simon the Pharisee, which is this: Whereas she came to Jesus unassuming about her sin, Simon assumed he was alright. Whereas this woman understood herself to be like the debtor in the parable who had been forgiven much, Simon behaved as the debtor who believed his debt to be no big deal.

Yet, as it was for the sinful woman, so it was for Simon. That is, if we will think carefully about the parable for a moment, we will discover that the debt of both of the debtors in the parable is ultimately the same. "Wait a minute!" you may be thinking. "No it isn't! One owed only 50 denarius and the other's debt was 500." That doesn't sound like the same amount of debt." Well, while it is true that the "dollar values" might have been very different, the most important truth about the debt of both debtors is not revealed in the specific numbers but in the condition that Jesus highlights in verse 42, where He says about the debt of both, "*Neither of them had the money to pay him back.*"

You see, it didn't really matter whether the debt was 50 denarius or 500 or 5000; the key idea Jesus is communicating here is the fact that each man's debt was too big for him to repay. The most pertinent point is that both debtors utterly lacked the resources necessary to free them from their obligation to the money lender.

And the same is certainly true of us, isn't it? Some of us may have notorious pasts that are characterized by public knowledge of numerous legal infractions. Others of us may have swallowed the keys to countless closets stuffed with dark secrets. Still others of us may appear to everybody to be as clean as a whistle. However, the ultimately important truth is that, regardless of the specific events of our past and even present lives, all of us owe a debt to God that is infinitely greater than our ability to repay it. Our debt is sin; the money lender is God; and the currency is righteousness. And that is the foundation of this parable. When measured against the perfect holiness of God, all of us are bankrupt and completely unable to repay our debt to Him by ourselves.

Therefore, love that pleases the Lord is born of a heart that realizes the infinitely profound depth of this truth. That is, the more we understand how utterly dependent we are upon the matchless mercy of Jesus Christ and the forgiveness He purchased for us on the cross, the more we will grow in a love for God that pleases Him. You see, the woman's debt was really no greater than that of the Pharisee's. While her sins may have engendered more obvious worldly consequences, in God's economy, she was in exactly the same position as Simon. Both of them had sinned against God and owed to Him a debt that neither one could possibly repay.

This woman did not love God more because she *needed* His forgiveness more than Simon, but because *appreciated* it more. Because Simon assumed he was good enough for God, he was blind to the manifold marvel of Christ's mercy. However, because this woman came to Christ with an unassuming attitude, she had a much greater understanding of the depth of her depravity. In the same way, as our understanding of our own depravity grows, our sincere appreciation for God's limitless mercy will inevitably grow as well, and one of the highest hallmarks of true love for Christ is genuine gratitude for the perfect mercy He poured out for us on the cross. True transformation only comes to the one who comes to Christ unassuming.

If we would be truly transformed the second way we must come to Christ is this: We must...

2.) Come unashamed.

It is a common characteristic among us all that nobody wants to look stupid. However, have you ever noticed how our badly attempts to impress others usually

backfire? That is, have you ever noticed how our fear of being ashamed usually ends up making us look like fools?

- Take for example the peculiar progression of my adolescent fashion trends:
 - 5th grade – The parachute pants with a tie phase
 - 6th grade – The rat tail for a haircut phase
 - 7th grade – The mohawk-spike hairdo and pants with no knees phase
 - 8th-10th grade – A blur... I just hope I never went to school naked...
 - 11th-12th grade – Deluge-denim phase – Pants rolled up at the bottom, ready for a flood, I guess?
 - And the sad thing is that, at each and every stage, I thought I looked so cool. (I probably should have just let my mom dress me.)
- The situation is no different today.
 - Teenagers: You, in particular, are going to look back one day on the fashion trends of your generation and have a good laugh.
 - Take, for example, boys who intentionally let their jeans hang so low that their underwear is showing. In my generation, someone would have snuck up behind you and made sure that those sagging came all the way down.

The point is this: The fear of being ashamed will make fools of us all. And that statement has probably never been truer of anyone than it was of the Pharisees, for their fear of being ashamed seems to have been one of the main reasons why they, by and large, rejected Jesus. Think about it: Throughout their encounters with our Lord, they continually attempted to embarrass Him, and, yet, it was always they who ended up “with the egg on their faces.” Jesus routinely discredited their questions aimed at discrediting Him, and He powerfully exposed their great hypocrisy and theological errors over and over again. In fact, Jesus had damaged the prestige of these religious leaders so badly that in [Matthew 22:46](#) we read, “*No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask [Jesus] any more questions.*” And tragically, because their love for their own image and stature was so much greater than their love for God, many Pharisees found it more desirable to kill Jesus than to kill their selfish pride.

Therefore, if we are going allow God to transform our hearts for His glory, then we simply cannot come to Him like Simon and so many of the Pharisees did. Their whole lives were wrapped up in what others thought of them. Let it not be so for us. Their entire motivation was to build themselves up in the eyes of others. Let it not be true for you and me. Their lives were wrapped up in obtaining the

praise of people. Let us unashamedly live our lives to bring delight to God. If we would be changed by God for His glory, then we must come to Him unashamed.

With that in mind, please look with me at verses 38-39:

And as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. 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.

As we discussed earlier, Simon had either neglected or intentionally ignored basic hospitality of the day. Perhaps he felt Jesus to be unworthy of a proper welcome, or perhaps he was just too busy. Perhaps Simon felt as though it might harm his image if he was too kind to Jesus. Who knows?

What we do know, however, is that this sinful woman was eternally blessed because she came to Jesus unashamed. At this point, she had ceased to care about her image. Her actions in this passage demonstrate precious little regard for impressing others.

And we can see her unashamed love in her washing of Christ's feet because the act of washing another person's feet was considered, in that day, to be one of the lowliest and most humiliating things that a person could possibly do. In fact, a respected Pharisee, like Simon, would simply never even have considered washing Jesus' feet himself. Rather, that undesirable, undignified duty would have been assigned to one of his servants. Not only that, but it would have been assigned to the very least of all the servants in his household. Thus, foot washing was considered a humiliating task among even servants.

Notice, then, the unashamed love of this sinful woman. Unconcerned about the opinion of anyone but Jesus, she bucked the stigma, stooped down, and started to wash Jesus' feet. What is more, she dried them not with a towel but with her own hair. And what is even more, in an act of the utmost outrage in that day, she had the temerity to kiss His feet with her lips. Ugh! Even today, that sounds pretty gross—doesn't it?—especially if those feet are loaded with the fuzzy yellow foot fungus, that covered the toes of my good friend Kevin. Yuk! (See, you are not as hungry for lunch as you thought you were!)

Now, keeping the disgust that you feel right now in mind, look with me at verse 39, where we read, “*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.’*” You can probably begin to hear what he was thinking—can’t you?—because what he was thinking is most likely not too different that what you and I were thinking when I mentioned Kevin’s fuzzy yellow foot fungus.

Imagine the scene. While Simon and his guests are reclining there at his dinner table, in crawls this dreadfully sinful woman who engages in what everybody except Jesus would have agreed was dreadfully disgusting behavior. And as Simon is watching this weeping woman wetting Jesus’ feet with her unwelcome tears, and wiping them off with her stringy hair, and then actually going so far as to kiss them with her mouth, he is surely thinking to himself, “Yuk! Just look at her! How could she come in here—while we are having dinner, no less—and do *that*!?” And in verse 39, we hear his private thoughts: “*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.’*” In other words, he almost certainly means something like, “Surely any *real* prophet would be able to see that such gross and inappropriate behavior could only be the work of a disgusting and sinful person.”

And, yet, she went away justified while he remained in his sins. While Simon remained entrenched in a battle for personal glory, she found herself wrapped up in the unrivaled glory of God’s grace. While he surely made every effort to save face, her loving efforts revealed a faith that had already saved her. While Simon tried to be unashamed before his dinner guests, this notoriously sinful woman stood unashamed before the Son of God.

With that thought in our hearts, let me ask you: Is anything keeping you from pouring your life entirely out for the glory of God before others? What really motivates you more: Hearing God say, “Well done.” or hearing the same words from you friends, neighbors, and coworkers? Which fear is honestly greater for you: The fear of displeasing God or the fear of being embarrassed before people?

Here are the two main truths that we have learned this morning. First and foremost is the fact that you and I utterly lack the resources of righteousness that we need to pay our debt to God. It is the truth that true transformation only comes to the one who comes to Christ unassuming.

Do you and I really understand this truth this morning? Let me ask you: Does the reality of God's mercy ever move you to tears? Are you ever overwhelmed that God Almighty not only loves you but that He gave His only Son so that you could be forever forgiven? As we sit here this morning, do we realize that every ounce of hope that we have rests entirely on the loving-kindness of Christ?

And if we really do grasp that timeless truth today, then why is it that our lives so often revolve not around God's purposes and pleasure but around the opinions and perspectives of people. Why is the fervency of our faith so often doused by the desire to win the praise of people?

Let me ask you: Will you come to Christ and pour out your entire life before His throne of grace? // Will you come unassuming? // Will you come unashamed? Will you come today?