

“WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO NOW?”
by Rom A. Pegram (2/26/17)

Welcome to the conclusion of this GRACE ALONE worship series! Now, this doesn't mean we now know everything there is to know about God's amazing GRACE, but I hope and pray that it's wet your appetite to continue learning about God's GRACE through scripture in the days to come. *As we wrap up this 6-week study, let me begin with this story—to explain yet another truth about God's GRACE...*

A man by the name of Victor Hugo once wrote a work called *Les Misérables*. In *Les Misérables*, the legendary antagonist is the unrelenting Inspector Javert. Javert serves as a guard at the jail where Jean Valjean is imprisoned. When Valjean is given parole, it's Javert who insists that *no matter where he goes or what he does, he'll always be thought of as a criminal*. Then sometime later, Valjean breaks parole and assumes a false identity as mayor of a small town. A few years later, Javert—now promoted to the rank of inspector—recognizes his former prisoner and makes it his personal vendetta to bring him to justice. He tries, but Valjean avoids him...

Nevertheless, *Inspector Javert is committed to the rigorous inflexibility of the law*. And Javert does more than enforce the law—he *embodies it*. Our human relationship with the law is actually one of the main themes of *Les Misérables*, according to Victor Hugo himself. As a matter of fact, when they adapted the work for the musical stage, it was made very clear when Javert sings early on, “Mine is the way of the law.”

BUT, Valjean refuses to play by the same rules of ‘an eye for an eye’, going so far as to be gracious with Javert in many situations. As a matter of fact, Valjean's treatment of Javert haunts and radically disorients him. In the climactic scene, instead of doing away with him once and for all, Valjean actually saves Javert's life ... and Javert is utterly undone by this unexpected act of GRACE. Javert couldn't believe what was happening to his neat & tidy little world of the LAW ... and he has a meltdown! Listen...

Jean Valjean confused him. All the axioms that had served as the supports of his life crumbled away before this man. Jean Valjean's generosity toward him, Javert, overwhelmed him.... Javert felt that something horrible was penetrating his soul, admiration for a convict.... A beneficent malefactor, a compassionate convict, kind, helpful, clement, returning good for evil, returning pardon for hatred, loving pity rather than vengeance, preferring to destroy himself rather than destroy his enemy, saving the one who had struck him, kneeling on the heights of virtue, nearer angels than men. Javert was compelled to acknowledge that this monster existed.

This could not go on....

All that [Javert] believed in was dissipating. Truths he had no wish for besieged him inexorably.... Authority was dead in him. He had no further reason for being....

Folks, for Javert, as with all of us, *the logic of law makes sense*. He's lived his entire life according to the 'if-then' conditionality—*if you do wrong, then you must be punished*. Living within those parameters makes us feel safe. It's what we know. It's what we're used to. It's what's always made sense to us, so *it must be right!* 'Right? But, Javert would rather die than deal with the befuddling reality of GRACE ... so he jumps in the river and ends his life. Can you believe it?

He chooses death over GRACE, control over chaos. And very much like Javert, *we are—by nature—allergic to GRACE*. The logic of GRACE is *deeply offensive* to our *law-addicted hearts*. Good people get good stuff; bad people get bad stuff ... is what we've been taught. BUT GRACE has a way of turning those thoughts upside down...

And this *offensiveness of GRACE* isn't just limited to literature or theatre; it's one of the main themes of scripture. As we all know, Jesus encountered massive amounts of resistance to his ministry; in fact, *his message of GRACE is what got him killed*. And as much as we might crave GRACE when we're at the end of our rope, GRACE (one-way love) runs counter to our natural inclinations. And we can see it in today's lesson. Listen to this, as I tell you about ... A RUINED DINNER PARTY (Luke 7:36-39, NLT):

One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to have dinner with him, so Jesus went to his home and sat down to eat. ³⁷ When a certain immoral woman from that city heard he was eating there, she brought a beautiful alabaster jar filled with expensive perfume. ³⁸ Then she knelt behind him at his feet, weeping. Her tears fell on his feet, and she wiped them off with her hair. Then she kept kissing his feet and putting perfume on them. ³⁹ When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. She's a sinner!"

To grasp the depth of the offense here, we need to understand a few things about society in the ancient Near East. From their earliest years, young girls were instructed in proper etiquette. They were warned by their mothers what happened to young women who ignored the rules. A 'rule-breaking woman' would be the kind ... other women would shun. They weren't welcome in 'nice' society; self-respecting men looked down on them. They pretty much had to hide during the day and do whatever work they did under the cover of night. And if they ever decided to make things right with God, there wasn't really any option open to them. Once a woman was marked as being immoral, she'd *always be considered an outcast*...

Today, there're social programs to help women like this. And yet, in some ways, we've romanticized these situations and people. We tend to look on them with pity and wonder to ourselves how in the world they ever got where they're at now. ... But *in Israel, in Jesus' day, you would never have found that kind of pity!* Think more along the lines of disdain for celebrities like Lindsay Lohan—feelings leveled at someone who should know better! That's more what it was like in Jesus' day. Today, we throw rocks via online character assassination; in Jesus' day, they just threw rocks. So, in light of our story for today, let me first say this...

GOD'S GRACE IS BIGGER THAN ANY REPUTATION. Folks, as we think about today's story of 'the ruined dinner party', notice the names ... and the lack thereof. We're given the Pharisee's name who invited Jesus to dinner (Simon) ... BUT the name of the woman who barges in ... goes unrecorded. Perhaps it didn't need to be recorded; after all, she's known by her reputation, the 'immoral woman', the 'sinner'. When news of what happened gets out in the community, chances are nobody wonders who the 'she' is...

Let me speak briefly about the 'offense' of what's happening here at this dinner party: Not only was this woman despised for her lifestyle, but evidently she wasn't afraid of adding fuel to the fire. First, she enters Simon's house *uninvited* and *unaccompanied*—both offenses, especially for a woman. "Who does she think she is? How dare she!" they were probably all thinking. This was the *last* person you'd want coming to a dinner party! ... And she wasn't just crashing any party—it was a dinner party at the home of a religious leader—a Pharisee, a holy man of God—the *opposite of a place where she might conceivably be welcomed*. ... So, here she came, the epitome of everything a woman should *not* be—rebellious, promiscuous, uncouth, foolish, and very likely diseased—and she threw herself down at the feet of Simon's guest. Why didn't she just wait for Jesus outside ... or try to catch him before he went in? And why wasn't she afraid of what might happen to her?

Well, her brazenness didn't end there. The disgraces just kept on coming! Out from under her soiled robes, she pulls out an alabaster flask of ointment. Onlookers could easily imagine where she'd gotten the money to purchase it, and for what purposes it'd previously been used. But now she fell behind a reclining Jesus, while Simon, his other guests, and even the house servants stood there horrified. She poured her precious perfume on Jesus' feet. Then she uncovered her head (yet another offense), took down her hair (yet another offense), and used her hair as a towel to clean his feet. Apparently she wept so intensely that her tears, too, made for a bath for Jesus' dry, calloused feet. And then she kissed him (yet another offense). Over and over again ... the offenses just kept coming! ... AND JESUS WELCOMED IT! JESUS WELCOMED THE KISSES OF A PROSTITUTE! And here's the irony of it all—*she, the unclean, was washing Jesus, the clean...*

Folks, you have to ask yourself: *What was she thinking?* How did she think others would respond? What did she hope to accomplish? And where did she get the courage to do such a thing? Do you remember what I told you some weeks ago about *the time* when GRACE will come to us? *GRACE comes to us when we're at the end of ourselves*, and this woman was clearly at the end of herself. Like an addict, she'd died to everything ... but her desire for help! She ran to Jesus, and he didn't turn her away. GRACE BEGINS WHERE PRIDE ENDS ... and that's a lesson for all of us...

This scene offended those who witnessed it, but maybe not for the reasons you think. GRACE offends because it *is* offensive! Unlike any other kind of love there is, one-way love (GRACE) doesn't depend on our loveliness. This incredible love began in Jesus; but never forget it's what put him on the cross! *People were offended!* BUT...

GOD'S GRACE MEANS BEING TOTALLY FORGIVEN. Jesus' final words to the woman in this story (V. 50) are these: "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." "Wait ... *WHAT?*" Jesus just knocked Simon and the other guests sitting around the table *off of their theological high horses!* "Who is this man that he can forgive sins?" they wondered. Of course, at this point, Jesus was not terribly concerned about answering any of *their* questions; he was busy connecting to a woman who'd been lost, but now was found! In other words, *he was doing what he came to do ...* and total forgiveness for those who repent and turn to him was the result...

Now, you may be wondering at this point whether Jesus granted forgiveness to the woman because he saw something in her; you may be wondering if her salvation was *the result* of her outpouring of love, rather than GRACE ALONE, but Luke 7:47 anticipates that: "I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love." The forgiveness she received wasn't *the result* of her love, but rather *the cause* of it. Jesus told her that her faith in *the forgiveness he'd already granted* was what ultimately saved her ... and it's what saves us too—*thank God!*

Now, let me move to the final thing for today—don't miss this part of the story...

GOD'S GRACE IS ESPECIALLY FOR THOSE WHO DON'T THINK THEY NEED IT!

In our day and age, it's safe to say that Jesus' response to this immoral woman is not really what gets under our skin; rather, it's Jesus' interaction with Simon the Pharisee, who is—after all—a religious person much like many of us... (Let's explore this for just a moment...)

We don't know exactly why Simon invited Jesus to dinner...

- Perhaps, as a high-ranking member of the religious elite, he thought it his social obligation...
- Perhaps he had a secret hope that Jesus *was* the Messiah and he'd be the first to discover him...
- Maybe he was suspicious, like so many were, and wanting to find a way to discredit Jesus in the eyes of his community...
- Or perhaps he wanted Jesus to see just how righteous *he* was and to honor *him*; we don't know...

What we do know, however, is this: Simon wasn't overly welcoming to Jesus when he arrived. Jesus was a guest, but obviously not an *honored* guest (i.e. refusing to wash his feet, a kiss of greeting, or anointing oil for his head). Simon though, like many who invited Jesus into their circle—even for a short time, was about to have his life turned upside down...

Simon's assumption was ... *if Jesus knew this woman was immoral, he wouldn't let her near him.* But, was that right? And folks, there's another even more sinister assumption hidden in his presuppositions and it's this: *She's different than me. She is a sinner, and I am not.* It probably never crossed Simon's mind that Jesus had to lower himself to come

into *Simon's* house just as much as he did to receive this woman's kisses. *Simon's problem ... was that he didn't think he had a problem (Pharisaism)*. The miracle was Jesus had a great love for Simon too and wasn't about to give up on him—*the one who didn't think he had a problem!* Listen (Luke 7:40-50, NLT)...

Then Jesus answered his thoughts. "Simon," he said to the Pharisee, "I have something to say to you." "Go ahead, Teacher," Simon replied. ⁴¹ Then Jesus told him this story: "A man loaned money to two people—500 pieces of silver to one and 50 pieces to the other. ⁴² But neither of them could repay him, so he kindly forgave them both, canceling their debts. Who do you suppose loved him more after that?" ⁴³ Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the larger debt." "That's right," Jesus said. ⁴⁴ Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Look at this woman kneeling here. When I entered your home, you didn't offer me water to wash the dust from my feet, but she has washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵ You didn't greet me with a kiss, but from the time I first came in, she has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶ You neglected the courtesy of olive oil to anoint my head, but she has anointed my feet with rare perfume. ⁴⁷ "I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love." ⁴⁸ Then Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven." ⁴⁹ The men at the table said among themselves, "Who is this man, that he goes around forgiving sins?" ⁵⁰ And Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

It's as if Jesus said here: "Simon, you're the primary sinner here. I've cancelled all of your *great* sin, but your love for me is *trivial* ... because you don't think you owe me much." What Jesus was really saying was, "Simon, what you don't understand is that right now, this immoral woman is more righteous than *you* are, because she loves me ... and you don't! You need to learn from *her*."

It's almost impossible for us to understand the shock and offense that Simon must have felt. But this man, who just a moment ago had all the answers, was now hedging; Jesus forgiving this immoral woman left Simon pretty much speechless. Truly, *there was more than one person at that dinner party in need of saving...*

There is nothing harder for us to wrap our minds around than *the absolutely unconditional grace of God*. It was hard for Javert; it was hard for Simon, the Pharisee; and it's hard for us! There's no way around it: God's one-way love is deeply offensive, so much so that if you're *not* offended by it ... you probably haven't experienced the real thing...

GRACE, folks, turns our world upside down; it throws our to-do lists right out the window. But perhaps the scariest & most offensive part of GRACE is ... *the question it asks*—a question we usually avoid at all costs. Listen closely now, or you'll miss it:

- NOW THAT YOU DON'T HAVE TO PROVE ANYTHING TO ANYONE...
- NOW THAT YOUR SELF-REGARD/SELF-RESPECT HAS BEEN FOREVER SECURED...

- NOW THAT YOU'VE BEEN FULLY JUSTIFIED IN THE EYES OF GOD ALMIGHTY ... WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO?

(In light of God's GRACE) *What are you going to do now that you don't **have** to do anything?* My hope & prayer, folks, is that once you realize you don't **have** to do anything to gain God's approval ... you may find that you **want** to do everything for him! That's how GRACE turns our world upside down. And GRACE ALONE is all we need...