**INTRO**

* A few weeks ago, we talked about how Jesus entered a complex religious system and simplified it
* Simplification is a matter of choosing fewer things over more, choosing what is best over what is just good.
* Mission as filter everything we do. That way we stay focused on what is essential (Mary and Martha).
* Discipleship process:
  + Stay focused
  + Lead new people
  + Based on mission and values

**TRANSITION**

* Core value: CULTIVATING a passionate relationship with God by glorifying God, enjoying God, and treasuring Jesus Christ above all else.
* Cultivating a love for God.
* How do we cultivate a love for God?
* How do we learn to glorify, enjoy and treasure Jesus Christ above all else?

**MAIN IDEA**

We will discover that we cultivate by recognizing and growing in our understanding of God’s love for us.

We will find that cultivating a love for God—like all of our other core values—flow directly from the gospel.

**READ PASSAGE**

Two passages; Three Characters and how they respond to Jesus

Luke 7:36-50; 18:18-27

**EXPOSITION**

A. Luke 7:36-50

B. Luke 18:18-27

**POINTS**

Out of these three, it was the woman—the sinner—who loved Christ. We are going to consider why?

I. Love starts with a right view of ourselves

A. The Woman – The penitent sinner

1. Reputation as a sinner; she was a moral, religious, and social outcast

2. She understood that she needed forgiveness and it drove her to Christ

B. The Pharisee – Self-righteous skeptic (I got it figured out)

1. The Pharisee saw himself as morally and spiritual superior

a. He invited Jesus to cast judgment on him

b. He denied that Jesus was a prophet based upon his criteria

2. He is not a sinner like the woman

3. He was managing his sin just fine

4. He was too distracted by criticizing Jesus to see that Jesus was exposing his need.

C. The Ruler – the Wealthy, Powerful, and Pious (I can take care of myself)

1. Good his whole life; doing all the right things

a. “All these I have kept from my youth.” 18:21

2. He is focused on what more does he need to do in addition to the good he already does. He is achievement oriented.

3. Jesus exposes his idol: he needs to renounce his wealth and follow Jesus

4. In the end he walks away sad. Apparently, he does not believe it is worth the exchange. Why? Because he doesn’t see the extent of his need.

5. 18:24-27: what is impossible for man is possible for God. He needs to recognize that he cannot be saved by his own works. He cannot be good enough.

Only the woman understands her moral bankruptcy and utter need before God.

“Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Mt. 5:3

D. Some don’t recognize their need

1. Jesus is the standard

How often do we put our needs before others?

How often do we value ourselves over others?

How often take advantage of others? Lust? Greed?

We justify in ourselves what we hate in others. When they do it we criticize and are disgusted. But then we say to ourselves, “well, if they get to . . . then why can’t I.”

We become those we despise.

2. God is holy and just: he cannot tolerate sin. We wouldn’t want Him to.

E. Some recognize their need but don’t care

We will all give an account to God for our lives and we cannot use others as an excuse.

We long for goodness, love, peace, wholeness.

We can only find them in Him.

We see that in Jesus. He is different.

* He loves the unlovely.
* He refuses to conform to social pressure or bow to the powerful.
* He always does what is right.
* He cares about those who are hurting so much that he takes on their pain and shame and brokenness and deals with them all on the cross.

Jesus’ perfect life reveals what we long for, who we long to be, and how far we fall short.

That longing and despair is meant to lead us to Him, where we find life, joy, peace, and real love.

If we persist in moral apathy then we are resigning ourselves to a disappointing, shallow, and unsatisfying existence. The pain, isolation, fear, emptiness and brokenness stays with us and only intensifies into eternity. Its called hell. Why choose that when you can have life?

Have the courage to care about your sin. Run to Christ.

II. Point 2: Love is a response to God’s gracious gift

A. In his parable, Jesus explained that love was a response to forgiveness

B. That’s why we start with the gospel. Our love is a response to what God has already done for us.

1. God’s love is the basis of our love.

a. How do we see God’s love demonstrated? Romans 5:8 (cf. 1 John 4:9-10)

b. Without seeing the need for our forgiveness, we cannot see the greatness of God’s love.

C. If you don’t believe you need forgiveness (Pharisee and Ruler), then you will not truly love.

D. The didn’t see their need and so they didn’t recognize God’s gift.

1. The Pharisee loved his self-righteousness: it made him right.

a. He had no sympathy for sinners because he didn’t realize he was one. He thought he was better.

2. The Ruler loved his wealth and moralism: it made him self-sufficient.

a. It blinded him to his need for God.

3. The woman loved Jesus: He had cleansed her sin.

What is your response to Jesus’ gracious gift?

1. Recognize your sin, your need for forgiveness?

If we are not impacted by the good news of forgiveness in Christ, then it reveals that you are blind to your need.

The greater the need, the great the gift.

The greater the gift, the greater the love.

III. Point 3: Our love for God grows as our knowledge of God’s love grows

Cultivation is a process. Growth is a process.

A. It’s a process

Sanctification: Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Phil 2:12-13

We work with God. We work and He works in and through our desires and actions.

The myth of things happening organically . . .

- Not artificial or forced

The Bible uses the analogy of fruit or growth quite often

Growing something requires a lot of intentionality

- Gardening or Farming

- Christian maturity

- You need the right elements or ingredients

Creating opportunities for growth

Your growth is ultimately up to you and the Holy Spirit

We present the opportunity; you need to engage

B. The Process

The more we understand our need for forgiveness and recognize and responds to God’s gracious gift, the more we love.

- See God’s goodness more clearly

- See our sinfulness more clearly

- Love Him more

How do we see these things better?

Gospel-Centered Life

1. We remember the gospel (Worship) – It’s the focus

a. During worship and times of devotion we reflect upon and consider the richness and meaning of the gospel.

b. It is proclaimed and we behold it and it drives us to adore and love Him more and more.

c. We grow in our understanding of our need (Is 6) and it fuels our love

d. We grow in our recognition of the beauty and extravagance of God’s perfect love and it leads us to love.

**Biblical knowledge:**

“Knowledge” is more than intellectual comprehension; biblical knowledge is intimate familiarity based on experience. It is to have entered into a dynamic relationship with the object known.

2. We live out the gospel (Groups)

a. Need:

1) It’s hard to love others and put them first

b. Gift:

1) God has loved us and is patient with us; he serves us.

2) We experience God’s love through others

3) We expect this from our family; they are stuck with us. But in the church with strangers it reveals the power of the gospel

3. We share the gospel (Serve): Serving others by sharing the gospel in word and deed

a. Need:

1) The needs of others reminds us of our own

2) Face-to-face with our own pride, selfishness, and greed

b. Gift:

1) We see it costliness, which makes us think about how God has given so much for us

2) As people respond to the gospel, we get to see and enjoy the goodness of God as he saves others

In each way we grow in our understanding of our need, our sinfulness because we more accurately see God’s holiness and goodness. And as we try to live out our faith we see how much we continue to fall short.

And as we see more and more how sinful we are, we realize how great God’s love is that he would sacrifice Himself for us.

**SUMMARY**

How then do we cultivate love for God?

1. We must recognize our need for forgiveness.

2. We must recognize God’s gracious gift in Christ.

3. We must continue to grow in our understanding of both by rehearsing the gospel, living the gospel, and sharing the gospel.

We look to Christ.

His perfect life reveals our need for forgiveness. He shows us who we were made to be.

His tragic but glorious death reveals his perfect love. He shows us how much God gave to make us His own.

**CONCLUSION**

**I invite you to simplify: focus on what is essential with us**