

How Can I Be Saved?

Lesson 3: Love in Jesus (Part 1)

Vocabulary:

profoundly	to earn a reputation	to be eager	resounding
to respond	reputation	to reflect	gong
to pursue	to be humbled by	sincerity	clanging
to perform	to see one's need	to bow	cymbal
checklist	tax collector	devotion	to fathom
temple	to be surrounded by	to confess	to surrender (something)
to know by heart	wealthy	to draw (something to oneself)	mosque
tear (n.)	to complain	pursuit	need of one's heart
to rub	to cheat	to be centered around	fulfillment
banker			

Discussion:

We've learned in this study series that God's plan to save his children began with the blood of animals. God commanded his children to sacrifice animals for their sins so that one day they would understand the final sacrifice that God himself would make for his children through Jesus. God sent Jesus as his spoken Word and truth made into a man. God called Jesus his one and only Son because Jesus spoke all that God told him to speak and obeyed all that God told him to do. Everything Jesus taught and did was to demonstrate his love for the Father and to show the Father's love to us. Jesus showed us God's deep love for us most **profoundly** when he died on a cross for our sins that we might be set free from sin and sinful desires and live a new life devoted to God. If we have placed our faith in Jesus's love and power to save us, we can receive this eternal hope of a new life, a life of love that will never end.

When we consider how to **respond** to God's love for us, it's important to know how God wants us to respond to him. We know from studying the plan of the Old and New Testaments that God does not want our **rituals**, nor does he want us to **pursue** righteousness as a Law to obey. He is not looking for us to **perform** a daily **checklist** of things to please him – reading our Bibles daily, going to church weekly, praying three times a day, and smiling at everyone we meet. We might do *all* of these things, yet not because we are trying to gain his approval or to show how righteous we are. When we place our faith in Jesus, God has already approved us! He has already made us righteous through his blood! Now, he wants something much more than our rituals and sacrifices. He wants our love in return. He wants our hearts. What does that look like? In this study, we will explore more about how God wants us to respond to his love.

A Heart of Love

In the book of Luke, we see a story of a woman who is filled with love for Jesus. She is surrounded by men, called Pharisees or Jewish leaders, who think they are honoring God. They pray and worship God regularly at the **temple**, study the Law of the Old Testament, **know** it **by heart**, and judge anyone who does not obey the Law the way they think it should be obeyed. Nevertheless, they show little love for others or for God. As we see how Jesus responds to this woman's heart and how he responds to the Pharisees, we can begin to understand the kind of response Jesus desires:

³⁷ A sinful woman in the town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house. So, she brought an [expensive] jar of perfume. ³⁸ She stood at Jesus's feet crying and began to wash his

feet with her **tears** and dried his feet with her hair, kissed them many times and **rubbed** them with perfume. ³⁹The Pharisee...thought to himself, "If Jesus were a prophet, he would know that the woman who is touching him is a sinner!" ...

⁴¹ Jesus said, "There were two men. Both men owed money to the same **banker**. One man owed the banker 500 silver coins. The other man owed the banker 50 silver coins. ⁴²The men had no money; so, they could not pay what they owed. But the banker told the men that they did not have to pay him. Which one of the two men will love the banker more?"

⁴³ Simon the Pharisee answered, "I think it would be the one who owed him the most money." Jesus said to Simon, "You are right..."⁴⁴ Do you see this woman? When I came into your house, you gave me no water for my feet. But she washed my feet with her tears and dried my feet with her hair. ⁴⁵You did not kiss me, but she has not stopped kissing my feet since I came in! ⁴⁶You did not rub my head with oil, but she rubbed my feet with perfume. ⁴⁷I tell you that her many sins are forgiven. This is clear because she showed great love. But the person who has only a little to be forgiven will feel only a little love." ⁴⁸ Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." (Luke 7:37-50, ERV)

The people in the town describe this woman as a 'sinful woman.' What sins do you think she did **to earn this reputation?**

What adjectives would you use to describe this woman's heart toward Jesus and toward her sin? What do you see in her actions that reveal her heart?

What adjectives would you use to describe the heart of the Pharisee? What do you see in his actions that reveal his heart toward Jesus and toward his own sin?

How does Jesus respond to this woman and why? Who is forgiven and not forgiven in this story? Explain.

Close your eyes and think about your own heart toward Jesus and toward your sin. Consider the following:

Are you humbled by your sin and **see your need** for Jesus's forgiveness?

How have you responded to God through laws, rituals, or your own personal righteousness?

Do you see yourself as a good person and others as sinners?

Luke tells another story of a **tax collector** who is **surrounded by** people who think they have God's approval but look down on others. Again, we can see how this man shows love for Jesus and how Jesus responds to him:

² In Jericho [JER-ih-ko], there was a man named Zacchaeus [zeh-KEE-us]. He was a **wealthy**, very important tax collector. ³ He wanted to see who Jesus was, but he was too short to see above the crowd. ⁴ He ran ahead to a place where he knew Jesus would come. He climbed a [tree] so he could see Jesus. ⁵ When Jesus came to that place, he looked up and saw Zacchaeus in the tree. He said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down! I must stay at your house today." ⁶ Zacchaeus came down quickly. He was pleased to have Jesus in his house. ⁷ All the people saw this and began

to complain, “Look at the kind of man Jesus stays with. Zacchaeus is a sinner!”⁸ But Zacchaeus said to the Lord, “I will give half of my money to the poor. If I have **cheated** anyone, I will pay that person back four times more!”⁹ Jesus said, “Salvation has come to this house today...”¹⁰ The Son of Man came to find lost people and save them.” (Luke 19:2-10, ICB)

How do the people in this town describe Zacchaeus? What sins do you think he has done to deserve this reputation?

What adjectives would you use to describe Zacchaeus’s heart toward Jesus and toward his sin? What do you see in his actions that reveal his heart?

How would you describe the heart of the people in the crowd and their reaction to Jesus and Zacchaeus?

How does Jesus respond to Zacchaeus and why? Who is forgiven and not forgiven in this story?

Close your eyes and think quietly about your life:

How have you sinned against God and against people?

Do you desire reconciliation and restoration with the people you’ve sinned against the way Zacchaeus did? What would that look like?

A Response of Love

Jesus is **eager** and willing to save the sinful woman and the tax collector when he sees their desire for his forgiveness. Their actions **reflect** their hearts and **sincerity**: the woman **bows** at Jesus’s feet, while Zacchaeus climbs to the top of a tree. Neither is concerned about what people around them or their society thinks about their **devotion** to Jesus. They only want to be close to Jesus and to know him. We see that both are willing to **confess** their sins and expose their weaknesses in front of other people. They no longer want to live the life they were living, but they long to be with Jesus and follow him. They long to show their love for Jesus through their actions, not just their words. They are not trying to prove their own righteousness or obey any law. They simply want to do something special for Jesus to express their love for him, their gratitude, and their heart to honor him in any way they can. When Jesus sees the hearts of these two people, he saves them immediately!

When God **draws a man to himself**, he draws him into love. In fact, this response of love, is evidence that God is truly working in a person’s heart. How do we know? We know because God *is* love. John helps us to understand this when he says, “¹⁶ And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. ¹⁷ In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have full confidence on the day of judgment because in this world we are like him.

¹⁸ There is no fear in love” (I John 4:16-18, NIV). When we read the Gospels, we can see that love is the center of all that Jesus taught, said, and did. If our **pursuit** of God **is not centered around** loving God and loving people, then we are not truly following Jesus yet. In fact, love inside our hearts for Jesus and others is the evidence of our salvation. If we love, we have no reason to fear! Paul reminds us of the importance of love when he says:

¹ If I speak in the tongues [languages] of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a **resounding gong** or a **clanging cymbal**. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can **fathom** all mysteries

and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.
³ If I give all I possess to the poor and **surrender my body** to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. (I Corinthians 1:1-3, NIV)

What does this verse mean?

What is the difference between religion and following Jesus?

Where are you in your love for Jesus? Where are you in your love for others? Explain.

When we think about religion, we might think about the things people do to worship God or gods—following a set of beliefs, going to a temple, **mosque**, or church on certain days of the week, reading a holy book, memorizing verses, praying a certain prayer in a certain way, fasting, avoiding certain foods, or performing certain rituals or tasks. Yet these things are things that people *do* and can make a person **appear** very righteous. Jesus doesn't want our rituals, rules, or tasks. He is not interested in our perfection because he alone is perfect. He honors our love, our humility, openness about our weaknesses, and seeing our need for him, his Word, his Spirit, and love. Our actions don't make us righteous, but they can help us to draw near to him!

Jesus is not saying, "Don't pray," because he wants to listen to our thoughts and hear every **need of our hearts**, and he wants to speak to us through his Spirit. He is not saying, "Don't read your Bible," for the Bible is the Word of God and that Word *is* Jesus. He wants to speak to us, guide us, teach us, and love us through his Word every day! He is not saying "Don't go to church," for it is through the church that we come together as friends to worship Jesus as God, love one another, and invite others to join in his love. He is not saying, "Don't serve others," for it is through our love that people will see his love for them and come to know their true Father in heaven. Jesus is not a set of rules to follow or a list of things to do. He is love and the **fulfillment** of all that God wants to do in us and through us out of his love for us and for others who will come to know him by our love.

Do you want to love Jesus the way he desires? Do you want to follow Jesus in love? In what ways do you want to grow in love?

This Week:

Write in your journal:

1. Take time this week to pray to Jesus and share with him how you want to respond to his love. Talk about your heart, your hopes, and even your fears. Share all that you think and feel with him in prayer. Write about your experience.
2. Consider how you have sinned against God and others. Are you ready to receive Jesus's forgiveness? If yes, ask him for forgiveness. Like the sinful woman, show Jesus love in a special way. Consider how you can be like Zacchaeus and make right the wrongs you have done to others. Don't just think about it. Go and do it.
3. Keep learning about what it means to love Jesus in our next study: *Love in Jesus* (Part 2).