

Truth or Dare? part 2

Truth or dare part 2 – The beautiful exchange

Luke 7:36-50 (NIV)

³⁶ Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. ³⁷ When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, ³⁸ 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. ³⁹ 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." ⁴⁰ Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said.

⁴¹ "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² 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?" ⁴³ Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said. ⁴⁴ Then he 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. ⁴⁵ You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet.

⁴⁶ You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.

⁴⁷ Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven--for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little." ⁴⁸ Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." ⁴⁹ The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" ⁵⁰ Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

We bought a new car this week, well not a new new car, a second hand car, but new for us. And after all the paperwork was signed the dealer did a little unveiling ceremony with a silky blue car cover and finally we were ready to drive away. The only problem was that our new car wouldn't start, and this brave new world of keyless ignitions was about to have its wicked way with us. We pressed and pressed that darn start button but nothing! We looked at the display panel and there was a strange symbol. We looked up the symbol in the car manual and it said, engine immobiliser. What? Why would the engine immobilise? We are good people, we are not terrorists, we're good people with proper ignition thingamabobs, start please start or we will have to ask someone and the answer will be something simple that will make us look stupid, start you spawn of Satan! Nothing, we kept pressing the button but nothing. We got out of the car and locked the door, opened the door, pushed the button again – nothing! We began to randomly press every button in sight, accidentally finding the radio and programming the navigator to take us to Poland – but no engine noise – nothing. Eventually we surrendered to the inevitable

and I did the walk of shame to the dealer, confessed my stupidity and he came to the car sat down and started the engine first time. I thought a bad thought, about the dealer. Apparently you have to put your foot on the brake, or it doesn't start. It is at this point that we both vaguely remembered him telling us something about that but our brains had conspired to give us some kind of cognitive wedgy.

I must say it was a relief to sit in the car, turn it off then turn it on, it works! We knew the secret that made our new car work! Exciting times! There is also a secret that makes Christianity work, it's just a little thing, but Christianity doesn't work without it, it just doesn't work without grace. While you can understand grace through complicated technical theological explanations, the best way to understand, is to see it in action and having seen it in action it's hard not to want grace for everyone.

On the night of the dinner at Simon the Pharisees, people saw it in the face of an uninvited woman, they didn't really recognise what it was, but as I will explain, what the people at that party saw that day blew their mind! To understand how bizarrely powerful this moment was, you need to understand something of this ancient world. In a hot dry climate people slept in small homes but lived outside in these interconnected courtyards. While there was a certain amount of freedom for people to come and go through these courtyards, you did not easily risk the power of the ruling man by just turning up announced. On this particular night the power of the ruling man had been on display. Simon invited Jesus for dinner but did not offer him any of the usual courtesies. This was a calculated public slap-down. Simon is saying to Jesus, this is my place and I want people to know that I don't respect you. That's pretty heavy, most people of the day would not have put themselves in Jesus position. Most people would have gone to any lengths to avoid public humiliation, but Jesus is different, he really doesn't care what people think of him, he knows he can look after himself and he loves to spend time shaking up the religious establishment.

But as we say, Jesus was unique, while very few men would be willing to risk humiliation, it would be virtually unheard of for a woman to put herself in that position. In this culture, women have some limited rights and protections but only in the inner sanctums of their own households and often not even there. It is for this reason that one of the striking features of the history and stories of this period is the complete absence of woman's voices in the public arena. There are no woman leaders of any kind because their world is completely limited to the private world of the family and to move out of that private world into the public world without permission or the protection of male family members was extremely dangerous, violently dangerous. Think Taliban, and their attitude towards women in public spaces and you are beginning to get an idea of the risk she is taking.

Luke wants us to be very clear about the risk so we can be equally clear about the power of what Jesus has done in her life. He has touched her life with grace and it has been a beautiful exchange. Jesus has bestowed on her *a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of*

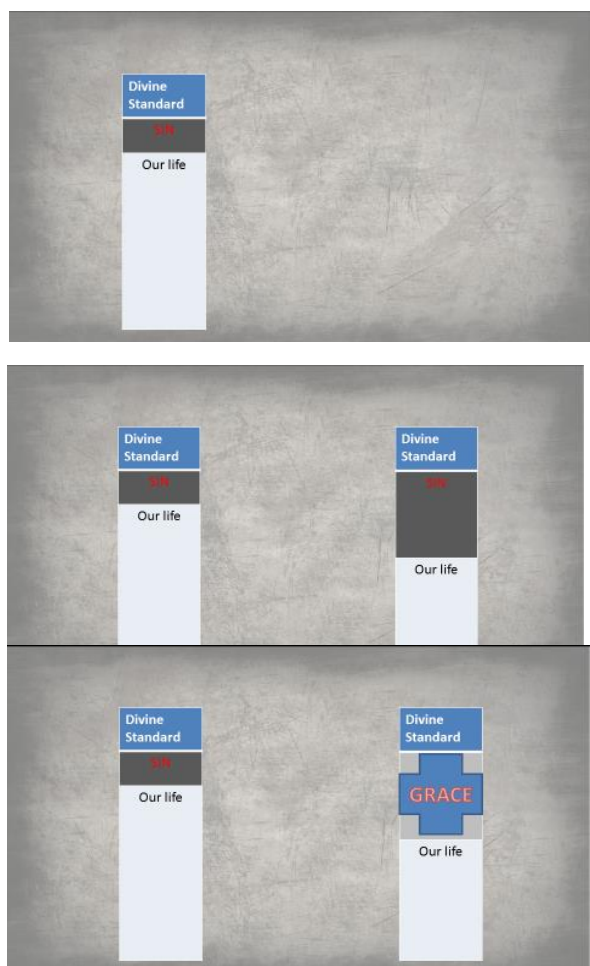
a spirit of despair (Isaiah 61:3). Jesus has brought her, life (John 10:10) and freedom (John 8:36) and you can see that life and freedom fully expressed in her outrageous outpouring of thankfulness at Jesus feet. This is why we need to share our faith because through that sharing there is hope that people might experience the beautiful exchange of Christ's gift of grace.

Now I need to stop for a moment and make a particular point about evangelism in our context today. While Jesus is always, the way the truth and the life (John 14:6), in different eras and circumstances there is a need for different points of entry into people's lives. Those points of entry are mostly to do with the cultural way people think. When Paul shares the message of Jesus with the people of Athens in Acts 17, he uses a very different way-in than when he spoke in a Jewish context. In the same way we need to use a different way-in to the lives of our secular friends and neighbours.

Let me portray the issue in this way. In the ancient world it was assumed that the way you measured human achievement was against a divine standard. Whether you were Jewish, Roman or Greek this was the accepted way that things worked. It was also assumed that it was difficult to achieve the divine standard and that the act of falling short was sin, which is actually what the word sin originally meant, *hamartia*, an arrow that misses its target. Jews used animal sacrifices and strict adherence to the law to try to bridge that sin gap between themselves and God.

Now the woman in our story is judged by the people around her to be hopeless. According to Luke everyone considered her to be a woman who had lived a very sinful life (Luke 7:37), someone for whom the gap between her life and the divine standard was so big that there was simply no help for her and it was generally considered best not to have anything to do with people like her.

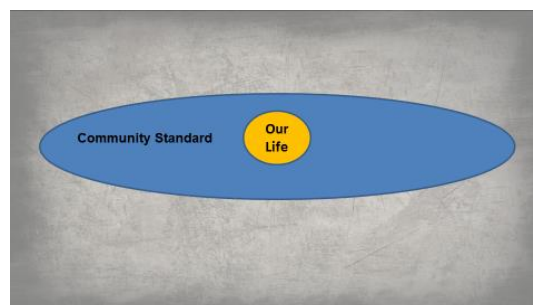
One of the things that Jesus has helped the woman understand is that the unfixable gap of sin in her life is forgiven – *your sins are forgiven*, says Jesus. Now historically we Christians have understood this moment through the lens of a technical understanding of forgiveness and for hundreds of years this has been the main way the Christian community has started our conversations about why people need Jesus. We have told people that they have sinned and fallen short of Gods standards,



they need to repent and be forgiven. The problem with that is that in our changing secular context it just doesn't work.

Years ago I was leading a youth Alpha program and we were studying this particular story and one of the girls said: *I don't get this story, why does she need Jesus to forgive her, she hasn't done anything to him? If I went into a room full of people looking down on me I'd just flip em off!*" As we talked more about this I discovered she was completely baffled by the need for God's forgiveness she really didn't get it.

The reason for this is that she doesn't live in a society that looks up to a divine standard as a way of judging human behaviour. She lives in a society that looks around at a community standard to give some sense of how to behave. Therefore, in our secular world the idea of sin and divine forgiveness has virtually disappeared, and as biblically true as those concepts remain, there is no wisdom in offering people water when they are not thirsty. There is no wisdom in using sin and forgiveness as the way into the faith conversation when people don't see the need. Thankfully however, this technical understanding of forgiveness is not the only way to enter into God's forgiveness.



The girl who told me she didn't understand the need for forgiveness went on our Youth Alpha Holy Spirit weekend retreat. During the evening worship on the Saturday night, the power of the Holy Spirit fell on all the young people, including this girl and she was sobbing along with everyone else as Jesus gave her a gift of love and forgiveness that she didn't know she needed. She experienced the power of the love of God through the Holy Spirit and it gave her a revelation of the state of her life spiritually, for which she was genuinely and deeply sorry, which is what the bible says that the Holy Spirit does, convicts us about our sin (John 16:8) and gives us amazing peace (John 14:27). Instead of the **concepts** of sin and forgiveness it is the Holy Spirit **arms** of our heavenly father wrapped around our sons and daughters (Luke 15:1-24, Romans 8:16), pouring out love and forgiveness, which overcomes all the cultural limitations of words. As Paul says:

...our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. (1 Thessalonians 1:5a)

Finally, let me take you to the very heart of what I believe God is seeking to give us a vision about in this amazing video testimony.

David Bennett Video: <http://www.channelc.net/tvchannel/David-Bennett-A-Gay-Rights-Activist-Has-An-Experience-With-God>

This is why we are doing the Timothy Prayer Challenge, that's why we are praying for those young people. Because we believe that when the Holy Spirit touches young people with that beautiful exchange of grace then we will see young people break through the chains of their own culture into something life giving and beautiful. I believe this is the secret that will bring the churches engine to life, I believe it is the

way we need to move forward not only in sharing our faith but in living our faith, asking the Holy Spirit to fill our lives with the beautiful exchange of grace.

We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange--I speak as to my children--open wide your hearts also. (2 Corinthians 6:12-13)