

Touched by Grace

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John 7:10-13

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As we follow the events surrounding Jesus' life, we last saw Him being challenged by His brothers to go down to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. Although Jesus resisted their temptation to go and make a name for Himself, John records that He actually did travel down, but secretly. He did not want to draw attention to Himself. *¹⁰ But after his brothers left for the festival, Jesus also went, though secretly, staying out of public view. ¹¹ The Jewish leaders tried to find Him at the festival and kept asking if anyone had seen Him. ¹² There was a lot of grumbling about Him among the crowds. Some argued, "He's a good man," but others said, "He's nothing but a fraud who deceives the people." ¹³ But no one had the courage to speak favorably about Him in public, for they were afraid of getting in trouble with the Jewish leaders.*¹ (John 7:10-13)

It's obvious that Jesus was causing quite a stir. John says that there was a lot of discussion and speculation about Jesus, but no one said anything good about Jesus publicly because they were afraid of getting in trouble. How did John know this? How did he know what the crowd was saying in private unless he was in the crowd? Although Jesus stayed out of public view, is it possible that His disciples did not? According to Luke chapter 9, the whole group left Galilee and traveled through Samaria on their way to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51). So John's statement about people keeping their thoughts and feelings private is actually self-incrimination. In fact, he is actually pointing the finger at himself.

However, about 8 months later, John, Peter, and the rest of the apostles are completely changed. Shortly after Jesus ascends to Heaven, these former silent disciples are brought before the Jewish authorities (the same one's looking for Him in the crowd) and are told to stop teaching and preaching in the name of Jesus. But this time things are different. This time there is boldness and confidence. This time *Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men."*² (Acts 5:29).

¹Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

²*New American Standard Bible : 1995 update*. 1995 (Ac 5:29). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

What changed these men? Yes, it was an anointing of the Holy Spirit. But it was also because for the first time these apostles stopped hiding behind a religion and were truly touched by His grace.

In the crowd that day, there were those who talked about Jesus, but apparently no one who had been touched by His grace. Because if there had been, you can be sure they would have spoken openly for all to hear, regardless of what the authorities might have done. And yet in this crowd were those disciples that had traveled with Jesus for two and a half years. They spent all this time with Jesus and yet their hearts had never been touched by the Savior.

What's the difference between someone who hides behind their religion speculating about Jesus, and the person who has been touched by His grace? Luke's gospel gives us a prime example of what this looks like. *³⁶Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him, and He entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. ³⁷ And there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, ³⁸ and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume. ³⁹Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner."*³ (Luke 7:36-39) Do you see the difference here? Simon's attitude leads us to believe that he wanted to study Jesus and to discuss what He taught. But this woman reacted differently. In complete disregard for social ethics, she enters the inner dining area right in the middle of these men. In disregard for her dignity, she lets down her hair and begins weeping. In disregard for her wealth, she breaks open the alabaster jar full of perfume she brought with her. And in disregard for who others said she was (a sinner), she falls at the feet of Jesus as someone reborn and made anew. She was open about her worship of Jesus because she had been touched by grace.

³New American Standard Bible : 1995 update. 1995 (Lk 7:36-39). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

Jesus says to Simon, *“For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.”*⁴ (Luke 7:47). And let’s not get caught up in the whole numbers game here. It’s not that she had committed more sins than Simon, it was that she did not hide behind some religion. This woman opened herself up to Jesus and found that He loved her, and that He would touch her with His grace. She knew what it was like to be forgiven. She knew that Christ loved her while she was still a sinner. Consequently, she loved boldly and passionately, while Simon did not.

Where is the boldness, where is the confidence in Jesus today? Maybe it’s because too many of us have never been touched by grace. Like the disciples who remained silent in the crowd, many people today keep Jesus to themselves. And confessing Christians give a multitude of excuses for not speaking openly about Jesus (play video clip).

I see many people burry themselves in religion and yet have no idea what its like to be touched by grace. I still see people spending a lifetime talking and studying about Jesus yet never knowing what its like to be loved by Him and forgiven by Him. In religion, Jesus becomes nothing more than an icon we study, a man whose teachings we discuss, and whose life we debate. But this is not the way it should be.

The same Spirit that transformed these apostles can transform us as well. But to become a Christian who boldly loves Jesus and one who passionately talks about Jesus, we must step out from behind the religion that separates us from the grace of Jesus. We must stop speculating and discussing about Jesus and stand before our Lord with open hearts. Only then, I believe, will we find the confidence and boldness we need to speak favorably about Him in the crowd.

⁴*New American Standard Bible : 1995 update.* 1995 (Lk 7:47). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.