

A Sinful Woman Forgiven

Introduction

Luke 7.36-50 details the story of a curious Pharisee named Simon who invited Jesus to dinner with him and others. Simon was probably not serious about becoming a disciple, most likely he wanted to use the occasion to try to find something that could be used against Jesus. As we read in the chapters leading up to here, we find that Jesus was riding a wave of popularity and Simon wanted a personal visit with Jesus.

The Story

As Luke 7.37 begins an immoral woman, a prostitute, walks in uninvited and unwelcome. Having people walk in off the street to a dinner party sounds strange to those in western culture, but during the days of Jesus it was quite common. Wealthy people would often give dinner parties and it was not unusual for uninvited people to come, sit along the wall, and observe everything going on. Sometimes they would even engage the invited guests in conversation.

What the woman does when she approaches Jesus however, was totally unacceptable as public behavior. Verse 38 says she was weeping so hard that her tears wet His feet. She *washed his feet with her tears*. She then let her hair down (something absolutely forbidden) and wiped His feet, kissing them and *anointing them with perfume*.⁶⁶

Simon was incredulous. He couldn't believe what he was seeing and thought to himself, *this man, if he were a prophet, would know who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him – she's a sinner!* Verse 40 says Jesus knew what Simon was thinking. It's a dramatic moment. The proud and unloving Pharisee had made up his mind. Jesus was an imposter.

Jesus replied to him, Simon, I have something to say to you.

Hear the condescension in Simon's voice as he responds, *Say it, teacher.*

And from here, Jesus teaches a private, pointed, and powerful lesson. A person who is forgiven much – loves deeply. A person who is forgiven little – loves little.

Why Was She Crying?

The woman knew who she was. She was a sinner, the town prostitute. *Everyone* knew who she was. She, more than anyone else, knew that she stood guilty under the law. She knew the prescribed penalty for her lifestyle was death, Deuteronomy 22.20-21. What was her story? While the details have not been

⁶⁶ Barclay says, "For a Jewish woman to appear with hair unbound was an act of the gravest immodesty. On her wedding day a girl bound up her hair and never would she appear with it unbound again. The fact that this woman loosed her long hair in public showed how she had forgotten everyone except Jesus." See Barclay, William. *The Gospel of Luke*. The New Daily Study Bible. Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, p. 113.

revealed, we know she must have had a story. Perhaps her husband had died sometime before. If that was the case, there would have been no one to support her. There were few ways for single women to support themselves and in these cases, prostitution became a means of survival.

Imagine her state of mind, heart, and self-image. She knew she was tolerated and used. It would have been very easy for her to have become hardened, bitter, cynical, and full of distrust. Yet, here she is in the presence of Jesus – reaching out to a Person who could see past everything she was dealing with. She knew she was in the presence of someone who cared. And as you picture the situation, how long had it been since she had been around another man who genuinely cared? The text says she cried. All of this in a house where she was unwelcome and did not belong. She allows her emotions to flow openly, deeply, and without shame. These are tears of grief, gratitude, and sorrow.

Jesus: Your Sins are Forgiven

In Luke 7.48, Jesus says to her, *Your sins are forgiven*. Can you imagine how this felt? Even she could be forgiven! Even after the type of lifestyle she had lived. No one can drift too far from the saving hand of Jesus!

We must all make the connection. If you are in Christ, this is what Jesus has said to you: *your sins are forgiven*. Forgiven. Purged. Forgotten.

As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him. For he knows what we are made of, remembering that we are dust.

– Psalm 103.12-14

“I am the one, I sweep away your transgressions for my own sake and remember your sins no more.

– Isaiah 43.25

He will again have compassion on us; he will vanquish our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

– Micah 7.19

He erased the certificate of debt, with its obligations, that was against us and opposed to us, and has taken it away by nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and disgraced them publicly; he triumphed over them in him.

– Colossians 2.14-15

Can you imagine how this woman must have felt? How did you feel the moment after you were baptized? The challenge is to continue living inside this attitude. We have been called to live a life full of gratitude and peace.

And let the peace of Christ, to which you were also called in one body, rule your hearts. And be thankful.

– Colossians 3.15

Christianity is about new life that comes because forgiveness has been given.

Don't Be Like Simon

Simon, who was so concerned about social protocol and status, had forgotten to welcome Jesus in the typical manner of the day. When a guest came over for dinner, they were always greeted with a kiss on the cheek . . . this sign of respect would have never been neglected if a distinguished rabbi came to visit. Jesus didn't receive this form of greeting. Because the roads were dirt, when a guest came in a person would pour water over the guests' feet to cleanse and comfort them. Usually, sweet smelling incense was burned, or a drop of oil was placed on the guests' head. None of this was done for Jesus.

So, what we see in this story is a distinct contrast between two attitudes:⁶⁷

- Simon felt he needed nothing. He had no love in his heart. He looked at himself as a good person, not only in the sight of others, but of God as well. Simon received no forgiveness.
- The woman was aware of no greater need than forgiveness. She breaks every social protocol to demonstrate love toward the only person present who could give it . . . and she received forgiveness.

Pride, arrogance, and self-sufficiency will separate a person from God. Brokenness and humility open the door of access to God. It has been said that:

the greatest of sins is to be conscious of no sin; but a sense of need will open the door to the forgiveness of God, because God is love, and love's greatest glory is to be needed.⁶⁸

For Thought and Reflection

1. Who was Simon and why is it likely he invited Jesus to dinner?
2. What happened as Jesus reclined at the table?
3. What were some of the social protocols the woman violated?
4. Why do you think she was so emotional? What can we learn from this?

⁶⁷ Barclay, p. 113.

⁶⁸ Barclay, p. 114.

5. What was Simon's reaction to the woman?

6. What had Simon neglected to do when Jesus came over for dinner? Why do you think he did that?

7. How would you describe Simon's overall attitude?

8. How would you describe the woman's overall attitude? What can we learn from it?

9. As we make the personal application to ourselves, how do we feel when we hear Jesus say to us, *Your sins are forgiven*? What type of response should this generate?

10. Why is self-sufficiency so detrimental to our relationship with God? What are some things we can do to resist it?

11. What is one of your favorite things about this story?