

Jesus through the eyes of a sinful woman and a Pharisee

Mark intro – “Two things that can wreck a church... if the lead guy gets into a financial scandal, or a sex scandal.” People watched Jesus for that stuff... Two key characters – Simon and the sinful woman...Dawn will cover the woman and I’ll be back to discuss Simon.

(Dawn) –

Let’s set up some context for this scene. As Luke moves through the early chapters of his gospel, he is methodically explaining “**Who Jesus IS**” – we see him as prophet, teacher, healer, rabbi, a friend of sinners, and even someone who can raise people from the dead! Now with this story, Luke is going to answer the question “who is this who even forgives sins?” Jesus is the divine son of God, and **Jesus has the power to forgive sins.**

Luke also uses themes of reversal – an upside-down kingdom – where the poor are fed and the rich go away hungry, includes a similar, surprising twist in today’s story.¹ It is not the **religious professional** but a sinful woman who is praised for faith and offered forgiveness. You may think you know this story, that you have SEEN this woman before, but I want to invite you to hear the text with new ears today. I think this is **a unique story** to Luke’s gospel that happens earlier in Jesus’ ministry, and the focus is on the woman’s faith and Jesus’ forgiveness.

So let’s look at today’s story, a story where we see Jesus through the eyes of a religious professional and a sinful woman...

- ³⁶When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee’s house and reclined at the table. ³⁷A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. ³⁸As 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.

³⁹When 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.”

⁴⁰Jesus answered him, “Simon, I have something to tell you.”

“Tell me, teacher,” he said.

⁴¹“Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii,^[a] and the other fifty. ⁴²Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?”

¹ Jesus tampers with the religious, racial, and social taboos of Jewish particularism by healing a Gentile centurion’s servant (Luke 7:1–10), interrupting a funeral and touching a coffin, and raising a widow’s only son (vv. 11–17) CBE

⁴³ Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven."
"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—as her great love has shown. But whoever 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."

Our story begins with Jesus entering a Pharisee's house and **reclining at his table**. **PHOTO** In the Greco-Roman culture of the New Testament, this seating arrangement was common, where the table is low and dinner guests are on mats on the floor, head toward the table and feet pointing away from it. This is good news in a culture where most people walked barefoot or in sandals – nobody wants dirty feet near their table. Hosts would normally offer to wash the feet of guests as they arrive, but today, this doesn't happen, and Jesus will call attention to this later in the story.

So, Jesus reclines at the table as one of Simon's honored guests. This is not a simple family meal to which Jesus was invited, but more likely a **public, perhaps Sabbath, meal** where discourse and teaching are expected. These public forums often took place in an open courtyard, or large room with the door open so that outsiders - perhaps the poor, perhaps simply uneducated people – could enter and sit along the walls and hear the conversation. They were invited to listen, but not to participate. They were literally "on the margins" -- **all were NOT welcome at the table**. This setting is where we meet our first character in the story – the woman.

Right off the bat, the first thing we know about her is that **she is in the room** where this meal is taking place. As with any biblical account, we know some things about the woman based on what the text says about her. But there are always other blanks we have to fill in – things we might wonder about her, or things we might assume based on what we know about Jesus, or about the historical context.

We also know from verse 37 is that she's from that town and **lived a sinful life**. The Greek phrase here is simply "she was a sinner." The text doesn't tell us what kind of sin, or what her living conditions were like. Many assume her sin is promiscuity or prostitution, but we don't know why, or if she had

any other means of income or support. Women don't generally go into sexual promiscuity without some level of desperation. The fact that Luke doesn't give her name but only describes her as "a sinner" indicates that is how they "saw" her. In the streets of the city, in the gathering at this Pharisee's house, her identity is based on her actions – what they can SEE. **Everyone thinks they know her, but Jesus really SEES her.**

Have you ever assumed you KNEW someone because of what you NOTICED about them? Have you ever treated someone as less than human, as a problem to be solved? That may sound harsh, but think of the person in line ahead of you taking too long at the self-checkout. Or the person who doesn't respond when you say hello. Or the person who cuts you off in highway traffic. Just like Simon's dinner guests, we can sometimes be guilty of judging by appearances rather than being curious to hear their whole story. The person who doesn't respond may have just received a phone call with bad news. The person who cuts you off on the highway just found out their teenager was in an accident. **Jesus doesn't see a problem; he sees a person.**

Something else we know about her from verse 37 is that she came to the meal with the **intention of worshiping/anointing Jesus**. This is no accidental drop by – she has her alabaster jar with her and came specifically to SEE Jesus – she knows he is there. Her actions are bold, premeditated, and courageous. Imagine her sitting at home wondering "What can I do to honor Jesus?" And then running to find out he's attending a meal nearby.

While it's not clear the text, I believe she already had an encounter with Jesus and **experienced forgiveness before** this event. She is not here to "do a good work" so that Jesus WILL forgive her. She knows she has been forgiven for a LOT. She is overwhelmed with gratitude for what Jesus has already done and responding with **wholehearted devotion**.

What else do we see in the text about this woman? She is standing behind Jesus and **weeping**, with such an abundance of tears she is wetting his feet. We don't know if she arrived early enough to note that Simon did not offer to wash Jesus' feet, but we do know that she now takes it upon herself to do what Simon did not do. She **offers hospitality** when the host did not.

The text also tells us that she **dries his feet** with her hair...We might wonder why she didn't use her skirt or a head covering. Some scholars note that loose hair could signify either loose morals or deep grief. But Kenneth Bailey, in his book, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, suggests that the use of her hair to dry Jesus' feet was "some form of an ultimate pledge of loyalty to Jesus" similar to a bride letting down her hair on her wedding

night.² The intimacy of her response is both **scandalous and extravagant** – she doesn't care what any of the dinner guests SEE, or what they believe about her – she only wants to offer her worship to Jesus.

And then, after the washing, she **anoints Jesus' feet** with the ointment/perfume. We don't know how much it cost her or if it was everything she owned. An **alabaster flask** was most often a ceramic jar which could only be opened by breaking the top. It could not be re-closed, so all the contents would be poured out. This costly ointment may have been set aside for her own nest egg, or even future burial. Because of the extravagance of her actions, her gift of perfume was likely a financial sacrifice. Olive oil was more common and would have worked just as well for anointing, yet she comes prepared with a much more costly gift.

She is willing to be vulnerable and humiliate herself regardless of her reputation. She knows that discipleship – to follow and become like Jesus – will require her **full surrender**. But she knows Jesus is worth it.

What about us? Do our actions show Jesus we recognize his worthiness?

- Are we willing to lose our reputation or to offer him full surrender?
- Would we empty a bank account for Jesus' kingdom?
- Are we willing to acknowledge Jesus in a hostile classroom or work environment?
- Would we offer full surrender if it meant moving to Africa or even hosting a resident in your home?

Jesus deserves our scandalous, humiliating, extravagant faith.

There is one other thing I wonder about her. While her sins are forgiven, **we don't what happens to her or if others come to accept her as a person**. In other healing stories, Jesus ties forgiveness to a physical healing, but here, there are **no visible miracles to indicate her healing to others**. Others may still SEE the woman wrongly after this – they may view her as the sinner she WAS rather than as the woman Jesus SEES, the woman she CAN be through God's love. If you ever felt misunderstood or misjudged, you can be encouraged by this fact: **what others believe ABOUT you does not negate the reality of what Jesus is doing IN you.**

Mark will talk more about the interaction between Simon and Jesus but at the end of the text we learn one more fact about the woman. **Jesus affirms her forgiveness and acknowledges her faith**. He not only SEES the woman but speaks directly TO her. While others in the room may have wished she would disappear, Jesus pulls her directly into view as a primary character in the story – he welcomes her to the table, as it were. Jesus tells her to **go in**

peace. The outsider is now an insider. The sinner is now forgiven. The lost is now found.

And just like this woman, **we don't have to walk in the identity of our past.** We can be the person Jesus SEES and believes we can be. **But each of us has to choose what we'll do with our alabaster jar** – our gifts, our time, our treasure. Do you have gifts and talents that are only being used in your day job? Is your time slipping away on social media or Netflix? Are there finances that could be better invested in kingdom purposes? Don't sit at home with your alabaster jar, waiting for a more worthy savior. Pour it all out for Jesus.

Finally, who tells the story matters, and the narrator chooses words that help us see his desire for the reader. Luke is a gifted gospel writer who includes the **details we need** to know that **Jesus has the power to forgive sins**

- Jesus has the power to forgive YOUR sins. The power to forgive MY sins.

In Luke's story, we SEE into the minds of the people present and watch Jesus set them straight through his own, well-crafted story. We HEAR Jesus' words to both Simon and to the woman, but the woman doesn't speak.

"[She] does not utter a single word, yet Jesus commends the power of her faith! Biblical faith is never merely something we think; it is also something we DO." So, in this story, we SEE the woman through her scandalous worship and extravagant actions. We SEE the woman through Jesus' words to her and about her. We SEE the woman as a person, not a problem. But we never hear the story in her own words.

This video will give her a voice.

VIDEO

(Mark)

Now, I want to ask – what would Jesus be like through the eyes of SIMON the dinner host?

- A wealthy Pharisee hosting a dinner party. Simon was probably a really good guy to have as a next door neighbor... Pharisees were good people. They love their kids, obey the law, don't do drugs, keep their house nice. They are doing so because they want the messiah to come and believe there is a tie between their passion and the messiah coming. So when you think about Simon, think about your "NICEST" neighbor and you probably have a good idea.
- He may have had many motivations for inviting Jesus over, but We know he was not a "Fan Boy". He knows that it is customary to wash your guest's feet, OR have a servant wash his feet OR at LEAST give him water to wash his own feet. But none of that from Simon. It would be customary to greet them with a kiss, but Simon does not express this pleasantry. He treats Jesus as a guest at arm's length. He is cool toward Jesus. Now, it may be that it was a huge party and Simon just didn't get to him... but for sure, he was not treating him as a guest of honor.

Let me just pause here and ask a question. Is Jesus the guest of honor at your house? I know that you may not have him physically present to kiss him or wash his feet... but If Jesus were present and he heard your conversation. If he saw the way you loved people, greeted people, engaged with them. If he watched what you watch on TV with you. If he saw what you prioritized when nobody else was there, would he say "oh, I am the honored guest in this house, whether I am here bodily or not!"

Now Simon would also be a "rule keeper". Show of hands, how many people here are rule keepers? Yeah... love you guys. How many are "Rule Breakers." Yeah! Just like me. Perfect for a pastor... oh, and the rule breaker in the back who is like "I am not raisin my hand... cuz only rule followers raise their hands."

- Some of you have been raised in strict families – maybe Christian, maybe not. But the unspoken rule is "don't embarrass us in public." maybe there was NO hypocrisy in it. Your parents were just STRAIGHT laced. They were in church twice a week. They never said bad words, and they expected you not to drink, smoke or chew... or go with boys who do. They followed every social convention and expected the same from you. Your value was in your obedience. And the WORST thing that could happen is for you to do something in public that would stain the family name. Maybe, worst of all, you were pastor's kids... And everybody expected perfect morality from you. If that is you, you get Simon.
- **Haiven and Trinity Sessions Story?**
- You know what this does to your soul? You superimpose on God what you learned from your parents. You think the rules are what matter... and God id deathly afraid of being

embarrassed by you. But can I just say “that’s not what God is like.” His expectation for you is not that you become a rule follower. It is that you become so secure in his deep deep love for you that you embrace your identity as a son or daughter who is deeply wanted, loved, valued for who you are! It is to learn to flow with his love onto those around you so that they experience the love of God when they are with you. It is not about the ‘list’. It is all about the love. If you have Simon’s mentality, you need to continually tell yourself – I am valuable because I am loved, not because I perform. God could never love me more and he could never love me less...

Commented [GU1]: great tie in to song at end.

- But Simon was a rule follower. So when the “sinful” woman touched Jesus, they were like “Ummm... not a good idea. If he was really a man of God, he would push her away.”
 - I am guessing it came from the insecurity of Simon’s phariseeism. Simon has been a ‘good boy’ his whole life. He has played by the rules. He kept the system. He didn’t embarrass the family. Now this... this is embarrassing...”
- He doesn’t see a PERSON, he sees a PROBLEM. “Don’t touch that.” Hammer “Cant touch this”.
- Phrase “Simon, I have something to tell you...” Oh, when Jesus says that to you... watch out...
 - Simon responds “Tell me teacher.” But I just wish I knew his tone of voice, don’t you?
- Jesus LOVES Simon. He SEES Simon. But he loves him so much, that he is not willing let him stay stuck – thinking he needs to keep rules to earn God’s forgiveness. Did you know that? I don’t care if you are 8 or 80 – fresh out of seminary or fresh out of jail. God does not want you stuck where you are. He wants to break you out to freedom. Instantly he sees Simon’s problem – he thinks this woman’s behavior is not appropriate. And that Jesus accepting her behavior is not appropriate. It betrays the notion that he thinks she is hopeless... and a good teacher would leave her in the margins. So, Jesus drops a truth bomb.

Commented [GU2]: we can flip this in my section where Jesus sees her - He doesn't see a problem, he sees a person :-)

The parable –

- Two debts, **neither** can pay, **both** are forgiven. And that leads to a critical truth: **All are welcome in the kingdom, whether forgiven for a lot or a little**
- Simon is welcome. The woman is welcome. In fact, we only have a difference in our sin levels when we compare ourselves to each other. **Compared to Billy Bob**, I am actually a pretty good guy, we say. **But when we put God on the scale** everything changes. The truth is... my righteousness and Billy Bob’s are both pathetic compared with the almighty God who is the very definition of righteous. He is the king of goodness. And when we realize that, we all need forgiveness. But Jesus actually lets it sit in the human perspective for a moment...
- One guy owes ten times the amount of the other guy. Like Simon, lets say she is TEN TIMES as sinful as you. Both get forgiven, who loves more.
- Forgiveness leads to love. I love meeting new believers who come to Christ as adults. Because they take nothing for granted. They are like “DID YOU KNOW... that I am a daughter of God?” OH, oh... DID YOU KNOW that I don’t have to be anxious anymore...

and Jesus brings peace? DID YOU KNOW that Jesus can give me power to break my sin patterns? This is SO cool! And those of us who grew up in the church are like yah... and he does miracles and throws out demons and stuff too...

- Listen friends... Jesus wanted the woman, who KNEW she needed forgiveness... to walk away free. AND he wanted Simon to walk away free. He knew that sinner-people would read this text and that self-righteous people would read this text and he wants BOTH to know they can be free – free from SIN and free from SELF RIGHTEOUSNESS. The woman's tears and perfume make perfect sense... because she was SUPER aware of her forgiveness.

• **Jesus doesn't see a problem, Jesus sees potential!**

- You see, Jesus knows what happens on the backside of forgiveness... transformation!
- And now... now Luke is making a cumulative case for Jesus chapter by chapter... he heals, he calms storms, he multiplies bread, he cures leprosy and... he forgives sins. Who is this guy? He is Jesus... he is EVERYTHING! And the question for us is 'how to you respond to him?'

The application / invitation **Megan begins Music Here**

- We don't know what Simon did – did he get a new view on people? Acknowledge forgiveness?
- We don't know what the woman did? New lifestyle? Become a disciple and travel? We don't know.
- Luke leaves this vague on purpose to challenge you – will you stay stuck in sin and self righteousness or will you change to live in the love of Jesus. Take a deep breath and consider his love while Erin sings this song.

SONG - Perfectly loved by rachael lampa and TobyMac

The closing