

Who Loves More? Luke 7:36-48

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Who Was This?*

1. Luke is the only one of the gospel writers to include this story.
2. He does so to show the *growing difference* between the way the common people *enthusiastically received* Jesus & the *increasing opposition* by the religious leaders.
3. Because of the similarity of this story to another that takes place later in Bethany, many assume this woman was Mary, the sister of Martha & Lazarus. It's not.
4. Nor is she Mary Magdalene as some have assumed.

B. *Two Lessons*

1. While this woman remains nameless, the lesson her example teaches lives on.
2. Actually, there are 2 lessons I want to draw from this passage today.

II. TEXT

A. *Vs. 36-38*

³⁶ Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat.

1. The houses of the upper-class were built around a central, open courtyard.
 - a. This courtyard usually held a garden with a fountain.
 - b. During the warm seasons of the year, it was there the meals would be taken.
2. Hospitality was a common feature of the ancient middle-eastern world, and rabbis were much sought-after guests.
3. When a *rabbi* was invited to someone's home for a meal, it was understood that *other* guests could invite themselves to come & listen to his teaching.
4. We read that a Pharisee, one of those super-religious men who'd begun to *criticize* Jesus, invited Him to his home for a meal.
5. Even though this man's invitation wasn't entirely *sincere* as we'll see, *Jesus went*.
6. Christian, be encouraged about that friend or loved one who seems

disinterested in spiritual things, or who maybe has even poked fun at your faith.

- a. The Spirit of God is still at work on them.
 - b. Jesus is ready, at the slightest openness, to enter their lives & deal with them as He did with this Pharisee.
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7. When a guest of honor entered a home like this Pharisee's, 3 things were *always* done as acts of simple hospitality and to show respect. [\[1\]](#)
 - a. **First**, the host placed his hand on the guest's shoulder & extended "Shalom" to him by giving him the *kiss of peace*.
 - 1) This was a mark of respect which was *never withheld* from a guest of honor –
 - 2) And *most especially* from a distinguished Rabbi like Jesus.
 - b. **Second**, since the roads were dusty & their shoes were sandals, their feet were always mucked.
 - 1) When guests entered a home, a servant would be tasked to wash their feet.
 - 2) A guest, like a rabbi, would receive *special* attention, often having his feet washed by the *host himself*.
 - c. **Third**, the host would pour some perfume onto the head of the guest as a way to refresh him.
 - 1) The more honored the guest, the more expensive the perfume.
 - 2) Because they lacked the convenience of modern plumbing, baths were infrequent.
 - 3) A drop or two of fragrant oil would help mask the less than pleasant odors that might otherwise intrude on the enjoyment of the meal.
8. These 3 things were acts of welcome good manners *demanding*. But in the case of this Pharisee, not one of them was done.
9. This gives us a clue to the *motive* behind his invitation.
 - a. Luke's already told us in Ch. 6 the Pharisees were looking for a way to condemn Jesus. So this was likely a set-up.
 - b. They were looking for something with which to condemn Jesus,
 - c. Things didn't turn out as they hoped.

37 And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when

she knew that *Jesus* sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, ³⁸ and stood at His feet behind *Him* weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped *them* with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed *them* with the fragrant oil.

10. It was understood that anyone could show up at such a meal held in honor of a rabbi, so they could enjoy the pearls of wisdom he would impart.

11. Along with those who came into the Pharisee's house was a woman with a bad rep.

a. Luke calls her a "sinner," a euphemism for '*prostitute*.'

b. This woman was a notorious one at that, since the Pharisee knew all about her reputation.

12. By comparing the Gospels we discover that just prior to this, Jesus had been teaching the crowd.

a. With utmost tenderness & urgency He said He'd come to reveal the Father-heart of God.

b. Then He said . . . [Matthew 11:28-30]

²⁸ Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

c. When a rabbi said, "Take my yoke and learn of me," it was an invitation to disciples.

13. This woman heard those words - and the doors to God she thought were closed tight against her swung wide open.

a. The crushing desperation that had marked her life as a woman with a reputation she could never undo, lifted in the hope of a *new life*.

b. Jesus was the *first man* she'd ever met who didn't look at her with either *loathing* or *lust*. She found forgiveness in Him.

14. So when she heard He was the guest of honor at the Pharisee's house, she went.

a. The moment she saw Him, she took her place behind where He was seated and began to weep great tears of brokenness that

- dropped onto his feet.
- b. According to the customs of the time, when they ate, they did not sit in chairs at a table as we do.
 - c. The table was low to the floor & they reclined on their left arm, head toward the table with their feet stretched away.
 - d. So this woman would be on her knees, bent over Jesus' feet.
 - e. As her tears washed away the grime the Pharisee had failed to remove, she then reached up & undid the clasp that held her hair in place, lowering it to use as a towel to dry His feet.
 - 1) A woman's hair was *her glory* & the symbol of her *submission*.
 - 2) She kept it *hidden* in public; up & covered by a veil.
 - 3) The only time she let down her hair was in the privacy of her home with her husband.
 - f. At this moment, kneeling at the feet of Jesus, overwhelmed by His love & forgiveness, this woman was oblivious to the presence of anyone else in the room.
 - g. The **Only Thing** that mattered to her was making sure Jesus knew how completely she loved Him.
 - h. So she took an expensive flask of perfume & poured it, not on His head where it was customarily placed, but on His feet – because that's all she felt worthy to draw near.
 - i. She takes *her best, her glory* – the hair & perfume, & spent it on what to her was Jesus' *least & most humble* – His feet.

B. Vs. 39-43

39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw *this*, he spoke to himself, saying, “This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman *this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner.*”

- 1. The Pharisees were well known for the *careful* way they lived.
- 2. Their entire lives were spent within the narrow confines of endless rules & regulations governing every conceivable thing.
- 3. And one of the things they were ultra-zealous about was avoiding any contact with people of dubious reputation like this prostitute.
- 4. In their minds, being holy wasn't just about personal behavior; it was also about who you hung out with.
- 5. To this Pharisee's way of thinking, someone who was godly would

never have allowed this sinner *near* him.

a. He would have retracted His feet as she got *near* so they wouldn't accidentally *touch* her!

b. Her *tears* would be a *moral acid*!

Her *hair* a tool of her *wicked trade*!

Her *perfume* -- *deadly poison*!

6. So when Jesus did *nothing* at her attention to Him, the Pharisee chalked it up as *proof* He was *not* a messenger of God.

7. The Pharisee didn't say anything out loud – He just drew this conclusion internally.

8. But Jesus heard his thoughts . . .

40 And Jesus answered and said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” So he said, “Teacher, say it.”

9. Couple things to note here . . .

a. **First**, Simon concluded Jesus *couldn't* be a prophet because He didn't know the woman's reputation.

1) Would **Simon** realize that Jesus' knowing *his very thoughts* would prove He was *more* than a prophet?

b. **Second**, Simon didn't reply to Jesus in the appropriate manner.

2) He called Him, “**Teacher**” instead of the more proper title, “**Rabbi**.”

3) Simon has now stripped Jesus of any sense of honor he might have had when he first invited him.

4) This thing with the woman has moved Simon to *downgrade* Jesus.

5) And now he's just being plain *rude* when he says to Jesus, “Say it.”

6) Literally – “Speak! You got something to say, say it. Get it off your chest.”

10. As far as Simon is concerned, he's learned what he needed to about Jesus & it's best to wrap up the meal & send Him on His way.

11. Simon may be done with Jesus, but Jesus isn't done with Simon.

41 “There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave

them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?" ⁴³ Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have rightly judged."

12. Jesus told a story about 2 guys who owed the same man.
 - a. One man owed roughly an entire year's salary. The other, about a month's worth.
 - b. But neither could pay, so the creditor *forgave* both debts.
13. Jesus asked Simon which one would be *more* appreciative.
 - a. In about as nonchalant a way as possible, Simon replied that he guessed the one who was forgiven the *larger debt* would be more thankful.
 - b. Jesus said to him, "Bingo! You're right!"
14. Then Jesus quickly applied the *point* of the story.

C. Vs. 44-48

⁴⁴ Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped *them* with the hair of her head. ⁴⁵ You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. ⁴⁶ You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. ⁴⁷ Therefore I say to you, her sins, *which are many*, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, *the same loves little.*"

1. **The First lesson** for us to learn from this passage lies in the words of Jesus to Simon in v. 44 when He said, "Do you SEE this woman?"
2. Jesus told Simon to SEE **HER**, not her *reputation*, not the sin that had encrusted her in evil & stolen the life from her; but to see **HER**.
3. Simon didn't see a woman, a person created *by God*, in His image, with the hope & promise of eternal life.
 - a. Simon saw a *thing*, an *object* that weak & wicked men *used*. He saw a *prostitute*.
 - b. He didn't see the *daughter* she once was, or the *sister* she may have been, or even the *mother* in all likelihood she was.

4. He certainly did not see what *Jesus* saw – The very reason He came to Earth to suffer & die.
 - a. Jesus didn't see just a sinner – He saw what *she would become* through His forgiveness & grace.
 - b. He didn't stumble at her past reputation because He saw her future glory.
 - c. She was no dirty whore, she was a chaste virgin who would become His bride.
5. Jesus invited Simon to see what He saw; to look at that woman, not through the reputation of a sinful past, but the hope of future glory.
6. That's how He sees us today. He sees us from the perspective of what He's making us into.
 - a. He doesn't relate to us through our *past failure*.
 - b. He deals with us on the basis of our *future potential*.

7. Here is a mass of thread & a piece of humble cloth.
 - a. To most of us, this is just an ugly mess.
 - b. To the embroidery artist, this is a *masterpiece in waiting*.
8. Here's a lump of clay; dirt, really.
 - a. To most of us, it's an unformed mass that's good for nothing, a thing to be despised and tossed away.
 - b. To the sculptor, it's a *masterpiece in waiting*.
9. Here's a tennis ball. In my hand it's worth 50 cents, In Andy Roddick's hand it's worth millions. It all depends on whose hand it's in.
10. Here's a basketball. In my hands, it's a loathsome thing. In Shaq's hand it's worth millions. It all depends on whose hand it's in.
11. Here's a golf club. In my hands, it's a dangerous thing. In Tiger Woods' hands, it's a thing of beauty. It all depends on whose hand it's in.
12. Here's a life.
 - a. According to the world, it's not worth much.
 - b. But according to God, it's the most precious thing in the entire universe,
 - c. So precious in fact, Jesus spilled His blood to redeem it.
13. We may not amount to much in terms of the world's estimation of greatness.

14. But we don't count our worth by that. We belong to God.
We're in *His hands*.
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15. But here's the deal -- Not only is that true for us, *personally*;
it's true for us *corporately*.
- And just as Jesus told to Simon to look at THE WOMAN; not the sinner,
 - So we must look *at one another* & see what God sees,
 - Not the past reputation
 - Not the scary or evil things of yesterday
 - We must see the men & women God loves & has made His Bride.
 - Yes, we must look at the lost and see what they can become through the gracious work of God – Trophies of His Love.
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16. **The Second lesson** comes in Jesus' words in v. 47, "Therefore I say to you, her sins, *which are many*, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, *the same* loves little."
17. Jesus wanted Simon to see the *contrast* between the way *he* was treating Jesus & the way she was.
- She was *adoring* Him; lavishing on Him the highest expressions of love she had – even to the point of being embarrassing!
 - Weeping so openly was a display of emotion that would earn her scorn.
 - What was *worse* was lowering her hair in public – that was *scandalous!*
 - But she was a woman whose reputation *couldn't get any worse*
 - And she didn't care what others thought; only what Jesus would *know* by her act of abandonment in worship toward Him.
 - Simon, on the other hand, had moved from a *lack of respect* to ought-right *rudeness* toward Jesus.
18. Jesus made it clear to him the reason *why* the woman was so earnest in her attention to Him was because she was *convicted* of her sin & had found forgiveness through faith in Christ.
- She was the one who'd been forgiven a *great debt*.
 - Simon was the other; one whose debt was small, but only *by comparison* to her.

19. It was *this remark* that would *prove* where Simon's heart was.
 - a. For Jesus was telling Simon *he* was a sinner **TOO!**
 - b. His sin might not be as *obvious* or as *great* in comparison *to hers* –
 - c. But there was still a problem of sin he needed to deal with.
20. Simon felt no love for or appreciation to Jesus; the rudeness of his answers proves it.
21. He sensed no conviction of sin because he wasn't open to it.
22. He was a self-righteous Pharisee who assumed He was okay because he compared himself to people like this woman.

III. CONCLUSION

A. Comparing

1. Who ought Simon have compared himself to that day?
 - a. Not the woman! He ought to have compared himself *to Jesus*.
 - b. If he had, if he'd opened up to the reality that Jesus was right when He said Simon needed forgiveness, things would have turned out differently.
2. Think of it – that day, in Simon's house, the One – the **ONLY One** who can forgive sins, was right there within reach.
3. The woman knew, went, worshiped, & left forgiven & free.
- 4⁸ Then He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."**
4. Simon refused, & remained in his sin.
5. Looking back – who do we recognize as the *greater* sinner; the woman or Simon.
6. Her sins were of the *flesh*. But Simon's were of the *spirit*.
 - a. His were far greater than hers.
 - b. His pride & self-righteousness blinded him so that though he *looked*, he did not see.
 - 1) When he looked at the woman he saw a *sinner*.
 - 2) When he looked at Jesus, he saw a *threat*.
7. Do we see sinners or men & women?
8. If we would see *people* & not mere *labels*, then we must see *the cross* – where Jesus paid for *our sin!*
9. Only when we see the cross will we truly see men & women.

B. A Time of Conviction & Repentance

1. The Holy Spirit has brought us a wonderful season of conviction of sin & an openness to repent before the Lord.

2. It's a season when, like this women, people are saying, I don't really care what others think, I want to worship my Savior, My Forgiver in a way that lets Him know just how precious He is to me.
3. And while the Spirit brings this time of renewed conviction, repentance, & worship – there are some who don't quite get it. They look, but they do not see.
4. Like Simon of old, they scoff. • I pray & urge – Don't be a "Simon."

[1]

The Gospel of Luke. 2000, c1975 (W. Barclay, lecturer in the University of Glasgow, Ed.). The Daily study Bible series, Rev. ed. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press.