
Knowing Jesus

The Forgiveness of Christ

Luke 7:36-50

2/10/2019

Main Idea: Gratitude is a proper response to the radical love God has shown us in Christ Jesus.

Lesson Objective: Worship Jesus with all of our heart because of what He has done for us.

Introduction

As your class time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Aside from your conversion, what is the most profound act of kindness you have ever received?

How did you respond to the person who showed you kindness? How did you express your gratitude?

What does gratitude reveal about the condition of our hearts?

Luke 7:36-50

³⁶ One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. ³⁷ And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, ³⁸ and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.

³⁹ Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." ⁴⁰ And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher."

⁴¹ "A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" ⁴³ Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." ⁴⁴ Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵ You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.

⁴⁷ Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." ⁴⁸ And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." ⁴⁹ Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" ⁵⁰ And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#).

Within our passage today we will find three main characters: a Doubting Simon, a Distraught Sinner, and a Delivering Savior. We will take a section to examine each character to reveal biblical truths that we can learn. While Jesus was eating at the home of Simon the Pharisee, an unlikely person expressed profound gratitude for His love. Simon's response to this expression of gratitude led Jesus to share a parable illustrating both the immeasurable forgiveness God offers and the only natural response to that forgiveness.

Doubting Simon

It seems that Simon the Pharisee had invited Jesus into his house in order to eat with Him. Having someone of prominence to sit at one's table had huge implications in the court of public appeal. In most of the countries in the Middle East, eating bread together is an important symbol of hospitality, even in the harsh desert regions. Each tribe had a hospitality tent with token food and drink for a stranger that was traveling through its area. So we can see that hospitality, in the days of Jesus, was a two way street. The person who was passing through received the benefits, but the person who gave to them would receive honor as well. We will never know the real reason why Simon the Pharisee invited Jesus to his house; perhaps it is because Jesus had just preached in his synagogue and the people expected him to show honor to the visiting teacher.

The word for table is *Sulcha* in Arabic. But the word does not only mean table, it also means reconciliation and forgiveness. Most small Arab towns had a table committee whose job was literally to set up a table between two feuding families to try to achieve reconciliation between them. If achieved, the two parties would eat a meal together. We can see this practiced throughout the Bible as people sat down and had a meal together to reconcile their differences. It is very doubtful that this was the intent of Simon, because he refused to give Jesus the honor that was due. However, it is amazing that Jesus knew the real intentions of Simon (even those of Judas Iscariot at the Last supper), and he still went in to fellowship with him. Jesus knew his heart and was willing to

extend grace and mercy towards him, but as we will see Simon did not return the gesture.¹

There seemed to be a nasty animosity towards Jesus, for Simon purposely omitted the common courtesies accorded any honored dinner guest. Normally the host placed his hand on the guest's shoulder and gave him the kiss of peace. But this was not done. Customarily a guest's sandals were removed, and his feet were washed when he entered or while he reclined at the table, thus removing the dust of the street and refreshing him. Jesus' feet were left embarrassingly dirty. Dinner guests were also anointed with a touch of olive oil. But there was no such kindness for Jesus.

Simon treated Jesus with callous, calculated contempt. He carefully avoided every custom that would make the Lord feel at home. All the guests and onlookers knew it as they took their places around the table.

In that day the homes of well-to-do people were built around central courtyards in which formal meals were served. The guests reclined on the left elbow on low-lying couches, eating with the right hand. One's feet would extend away from the table, in keeping with the belief that the feet were unclean and offensive by nature. At such occasions the doors of the home were kept open, and the uninvited townspeople were free to wander in to observe the conversation. Typically there was a great deal of coming and going by the onlookers.²

¹ Hannaniah O. Pinto and James W Fleming, *Jesus' Last Night with His Disciples: A Study of the First Century Historical and Archaeological Setting of the Last Supper*. (LaGrange, GA: Biblical Resources, LLC., 2008), 133.

² R. Kent Hughes, [*Luke: That You May Know the Truth*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 275–276.

The people who dined around the table would have been reclining on their left side while lying on a couch or mat. The meals were generally served as they reclined due to the influence of the Romans (they believed that slaves ate sitting/standing and the Jews did not want to be associated with slaves). As they were eating, a woman walked in with an Alabaster flask and began to anoint Jesus. At this point, we begin to see the doubt that was in his heart. He said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.” Simon had jumped to a conclusion that a true prophet would have never let a sinful woman touch him, and because this was happening Jesus did not know about her. Thus, He couldn’t be a real prophet. It seems that Simon was just looking for a reason to not believe in Him.

Jesus confronted Simon because of his lack of respect. Jesus told a parable in order to help Simon understand that love grew out of forgiveness. The more a person understands and appreciates his or her debt, the more that person will appreciate forgiveness. The natural response is to love the one who forgives, just as our love for Jesus grows out of having received forgiveness from Him. Jesus showed love in guiding Simon to see both the woman and her extravagant care. Jesus did not stop with emphasizing the rightness of the woman’s action. He also prompted Simon to contrast his own lack of gratitude.

How would you have reacted if you had seen or heard this woman’s grateful action or smelled the “fragrant oil” she used?

When do expressions of gratitude make you uncomfortable?

Why does the gratitude of others sometimes make us uncomfortable?

Read Luke 7:39 again. What is your impression of Simon?

A Distraught Sinner

The unnamed woman who lived in this town came to the banquet. Luke described her as a sinner. Although the nature of her sin is not identified, the term “sinner” and Simon’s reaction to her probably indicate she had a notorious reputation, which would explain how she was known by people at the dinner. Unfortunately for Mary Magdalene, many people have connected this woman to her because she was mentioned in the next chapter. Some have erroneously presumed that because of Mary Magdalene’s close association with Jesus and the incorrect association with this event, that the two had a special relationship. However, we must not take our romantic culture and superimpose it on the Biblical culture. The Biblical culture tells us that Mary Magdalene would have been much older than Jesus, perhaps in her sixties. She could have been a widow that was able to travel along with Jesus due to her prosperous fish business...sorry Dan Brown (*The DeVinci Code*)!

Luke described the unnamed woman as a sinner. Several social conventions were broken in the woman’s encounter with Jesus. We can notice in our translation that Luke called for us to “**Behold!**” He inserted this into the text to show us that this action was not expected and that we should be amazed that it was happening. Element of surprise must have come from the fact that she was a well-known sinner. The term sinner in this context would have indicated that she was either married to a prominent sinner or that she was a prostitute.

The woman entered the home uninvited, because Simon would have never let her enter the house. Another problem in the social conventions would have been when the uninvited woman approached Jesus directly. A woman

could not approach a man who was not her husband. This would have been unthinkable in Jewish society. Adding to this shame would be her sinful reputation. Any contact between her and a religious leader would have been strictly forbidden. Simon knew this and saw Jesus' compliance as evidence that He was not a true prophet, thus justifying his lack of honor for his houseguest. Another breach of etiquette was that she brought a gift and did not offer it to the host, but to his guest. Everyone sitting in the room would have noticed the disrespect she had shown for the owner of the house by circumventing him and giving it directly to Jesus. She didn't care about what other people thought. Each part of her actions spoke eloquently of her love and deep gratitude for Jesus.

Imagine the interruption of silence when her sobs became noticeable and her tears began to saturate the feet of Jesus. We are not sure when or how this woman knew of Jesus, but we do know that it happened. Somewhere Jesus had spoken to her and offered her forgiveness when everyone else wanted her condemned. In her trembling hands she held an alabaster flask, and as we can see in the passage, they were often used for perfume. Mark 14:5 indicates the value of the fragrant oil at more than 300 denarii, nearly a year's wages for the average person then. Such would not have been used for ordinary purposes, especially washing one's feet. Being overwhelmed with emotions, she did not care what the people would have thought.

Luke did not address why the woman was weeping. The context suggests love and gratitude motivated her to tears. Her tears also may have reflected remorse over and repentance for sin. When her tears covered the feet of Jesus, she did not have a towel to dry them, so she let down her hair and began drying his feet. It was socially unacceptable for a woman to let down her hair in public.

It was shameful and even grounds for divorce, but in her deep gratitude toward Jesus, the woman forgot social propriety and used what was available to wipe Jesus' feet—her hair.³ Not daring to speak to Jesus, the woman continued to wipe His feet, cleaning away the dust and the tears with her hair. Soon she would break open the flask and perhaps give Jesus all that she had saved. She poured out all that she had at His feet. Her humility and her love for Jesus led her to perform an unthinkable act of servanthood.

Simon's indifference and the woman's gratitude stand in stark contrast. The woman's act showed she had more than respect for Jesus. She had great love for the Lord and expressed it in an extravagant manner. The first sentence in verse 47 does not indicate the woman was forgiven because of her act of love, but rather that her love showed she had been forgiven. Because her many sins had been forgiven, she responded with much love. As Jesus noted, the person who is forgiven little, loves little. Addressing the woman, Jesus startled everyone at the table by declaring her sins were forgiven.

If you could see Jesus face-to-face, what is the first way you would express gratitude for your salvation?

What do you find most shocking about the woman's actions?

What risk was this "sinful woman" taking in coming to the house of Simon, the Pharisee? What does this tell us about her?

³Robert H. Stein, [Luke](#), vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 236.

A Delivering Savior

As noted above, Jesus was well aware of the lack of respect that He had been shown, but we can observe as well that Jesus did not mention it until Simon's judgmental stares at the sinner revealed the haughty and critical nature of his heart. The language used conveys that, although the Pharisee did not speak aloud, Jesus heard his heart. A point to consider is that even though he did not speak directly to Jesus, Jesus replied to him. Jesus was not under an obligation to help the man understand the error of his ways. This man had openly disrespected Jesus, and almost everyone would be willing to justify silence as reasonable response. Praise God our Savior is not that way. When we have sin hidden in our heart, our Savior wants us to recognize it and repent.

Jesus was also cognitive of the woman's humility and thankfulness. He knew this was not a show for attention or a possible ploy to elevate her status in the town by the popular healer's acceptance. In the moment of contention within the Pharisee's heart, Jesus set out to teach him a simple truth. The parable He used illustrated that the more a person understood and appreciated his or her debt, the more that person would appreciate forgiveness. Our natural response is to love the one who forgives, just as our love for Jesus grows out of having received forgiveness from Him.

Within the parable we see a comparison of two people who owned a certain moneylender money. One owed roughly two months wages while the other owed an estimated year and a half's wage. The Pharisee would have been able to pick up very easily on the point due to the relation of sin being a debt owed to God. As Jesus asked which one would be more grateful, Simon rightly answered the one who had been forgiven more. Now Jesus brings him

into the discussion. Jesus showed that there was no gratitude in Simon's heart for having Jesus sit at his table. He did not go out of his way to show any type of thankfulness or honor toward his guests. On the other hand, this outcast in society, who would have never had the privilege that Simon had, showed more gratitude because her sins had been forgiven. IN fact, Jesus called on the people in the room to notice her actions. Her attitude was evidence that she had experienced forgiveness. Jesus declared that her many sins had been forgiven. He affirmed this to her because her outpouring of love revealed her realization of forgiveness. Her love is not the basis of forgiveness; her faith is. As in the event itself, the forgiveness was unearned; and it is this fact that elicits her love.⁴

Jesus' declaration was opposite of the belief of the day. The Pharisees believed salvation was the result of doing enough good works to earn God's approval. They taught the people to follow the law; this would help them to do good, and God would eventually bless them. Here we have a woman that had done nothing right, but received the forgiveness that Jesus offered and in response received it and sought to worship Him.

What did Jesus see in this woman that Simon did not?

How might our worship be different if we were more concerned about honoring Jesus than we were about the thoughts of others?

What seems to be Jesus' main concern in this passage?

How did Jesus lead Simon to a clearer understanding of the woman's motives? What was the point of the parable (vv. 40-43)?

⁴ Walter L. Liefeld, "[Luke](#)," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 903.

What decision did Jesus' parable and questions help Simon to reach (v. 43)?

It's been said that the more we grow in our walk with Christ, the more we realize how sinful we are. Have you experienced this? How is such a realization vital to our spiritual growth?

When have you treated Jesus as Simon the Pharisee treated Jesus? To what extent have you treated Jesus as the woman treated Him? What leads you to these different responses?

Because Jesus forgives us, we can put our faith in Him and experience His peace. How do you deliberately live as a person grateful for these gifts? How can we do a better job of this as a group?

What is one step you might take to cultivate a heart of gratefulness to God this week?