

Jesus at the Home of Simon the Pharisee

Luke 7:36-50

Luke 7:36-50: Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. 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. 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." 40 And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." So he said, "Teacher, say it." 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." 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." 48 Then He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." 49 And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" 50 Then He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

Background Notes

It's important to note that this event recorded in Luke 7 is not the same event that is recorded in Matthew 26 and Mark 14. In Matthew and Mark the woman who anointed the Lord was Mary of Bethany. Both events sound very similar, but there are significant differences. The anointing by Mary of Bethany took place during the last days of our Lord's earthly ministry, in the Jerusalem area. The event in Luke 7 is at least a year earlier, and took place in the Galilee area. Mary of Bethany anointed the head of our Lord whereas the woman in Luke 7 anointed His feet. The anointing by Mary of Bethany was in the home of Simon the Leper, while the anointing in Luke 7 was in the home of Simon the Pharisee.

A second important point is that the Luke 7 woman is often identified as Mary Magdalene, but there is absolutely no reason to do so. She was an unnamed "sinful woman." Presumably she was a former prostitute, in view of Simon's thoughts about her. There is nothing in Scripture that says that Mary Magdalene ever was a prostitute. Mary Magdalene had been demon-possessed, but she was not necessarily a prostitute. The only connection between the sinful woman in

Luke 7 and Mary Magdalene is that Mary Magdalene is mentioned in the beginning of Luke 8, and some folks have jumped to the conclusion that she must also be the woman of Luke 7.

Doctrinal Points

1. Love for Jesus is evidence of faith in Jesus.

This woman, who apparently was a known prostitute in the town, must have heard Jesus preach, and repented of her sin. In love and gratitude, she came to thank the Lord. By the way, when she washed His feet with her tears, dried them with her hair and anointed them with perfume, don't visualize that she had to crawl under the table to do this. In that day, the dinner guests reclined on couches, with their feet extending away from the table. Furthermore, because servants would have been coming and going around the dinner table, it would have been easy for this woman to mingle among the servants and make her way to Jesus' feet. In fact, the dinner may have been held in the open courtyard at Simon's house.

In verse 50, the Lord Jesus said to the woman, "*Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.*" The only thing we know about this sinful woman from Luke's account is her display of love for Jesus - but notice that the Lord did *not* say, "*your love for Me has saved you.*" No, He said, "*your **faith** has saved you.*" She didn't "raise her hand for salvation," or walk up an aisle, or make a formal statement of repentance - and yet the Lord said, "*Your faith has saved you.*" Her love for Jesus was evidence of her true faith in Jesus. Her demonstration of love was not the **basis** of her saving faith - but it was **evidence** of her saving faith. Love for Jesus is evidence of faith in Jesus. This woman's love of the Lord was evidence of her faith, and the Lord said to her, "*Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.*" Love for Jesus is evidence of faith in Jesus.

2. No love for Jesus is evidence of no faith in Jesus.

We don't know why Simon the Pharisee invited Jesus to dinner. It may have been to try to trap Jesus in some of His statements. In any case, Simon did not show Jesus the common courtesies of the day, which included a kiss of greeting, washing the road dust off sandaled feet, and anointing the head with oil or perfume, because of the dry climate. Simon didn't even provide for Jesus to wash His own feet (v44) never mind have a servant do so. It's likely that the feet of the other dinner guests had been washed. And so the Lord gave Simon the parable of the money lender and two debtors - not because Simon hadn't washed His feet, but because Jesus read Simon's self righteous thoughts concerning the sinful woman, and that Jesus allowed her to touch His feet.

In the parable, both debtors were forgiven, but the one who was forgiven *more* realized the grace that had been shown him more, and consequently he loved more. The point of the parable was not that the woman was a great sinner and Simon was a small sinner. Simon was certainly as great a sinner but he did not realize it. The point of the parable was this: just as the debtor who realized how much he had been forgiven, loved his benefactor more, so the sinful woman realized how much she had been forgiven and she loved the Lord who had forgiven her.

Simon, like so many people today, thought he was good enough. He was a Pharisee and therefore very religious, and he thought he didn't need to be forgiven of any sins. Consequently he showed no love for Jesus who could have forgiven him. His lack of love for Jesus was certainly evidence that he had no faith in Jesus. Sadly, this is just as true today. No love for Jesus is evidence of no faith in Jesus.

Practical Application

1. Give your ill-gotten B.C. gain to the Lord.

"B.C." means "before Christ" - before you became a Christian. Suppose you were involved in some wrong or illegal activities before you came a Christian. What do you do after you become a Christian? Well, your life would change, so you stop the dishonest activities. Then, hopefully, you would do whatever you could to correct the painful situations you caused, and pay back what was stolen. But we all know that some situations can't be fixed, and you can't always remake what's been broken. What should you do with ill-gotten gain from your unsaved days that can't be paid back?

Suggestion? Give it to the Lord!

Where do we see that lesson in this account? Well, where do you think the woman got the money buy this very costly perfume? Take a guess. Most likely this money was money that was earned B.C., from her former sinful lifestyle, and that money certainly could not (and should not) be paid back to her former customers. And notice – the Lord commended her for her act of worship!

Some years ago, a person gave a large gift to Growing Christian Ministries, and he told me that the money had come from his sinful pre-Christian lifestyle. I discussed the situation with him and determined that there was no way the money could be returned, so the ministry accepted the gift and used the money for the glory of God. Maybe you're in a similar situation. If so, consider giving your "ill-gotten B.C. gain" to the Lord!

2. Don't get carried away with your historical background studies.

Knowing the historical and cultural background of the passage of Scripture you're studying will help you to better understand and properly interpret the Scripture, and it will guard you from making some incorrect or far-out interpretation or application. For example, remember the account of the paralyzed man whose friends carried him up to rooftop of a crowded home, and lowered down through the roof into the house? People moved aside as the bed was lowered before Jesus, and the Lord healed the paralyzed man.

Knowing the historical and cultural background helps us to better understand this event and properly interpret and apply the Scripture. The rooftop was not an angled roof but the flat roof of a 1st century Israeli house. And the men were not destroying property when they made the hole in the roof. The flat roof consisted of easily removed and easily replaced

tiles that were laid across wooden beams and interior stone dividing walls. So any sermon application that suggests we should use any means - even destroying property! - to get our unsaved friends to Jesus would be an incorrect application of this Scripture, because the historical and cultural background were completely ignored.

So we need to know the historical and cultural background when we study Scripture. However, we also need to be careful that we don't get carried away with our historical background studies! Take, for example, the fact that the woman washed the Lord's feet with her tears. Some commentators have suggested that she was not crying, but rather was emptying her tear bottle on the Lord's feet. Now it's true that in biblical days people used tiny bottles to capture their tears in times of sorrow. In the culture of that day, this was considered to give more meaning to the time of sorrow. So some commentators have suggested that this woman was essentially asking the Lord to remember her sorrows as she emptied her tear bottle and washed the Lord's feet with her tears.

That's a nice thought, but it may be fanciful, and it may be reading too much into Scripture. We would need more evidence from Scripture itself before drawing such conclusions. So we need to be careful. Don't get carried away with your historical background studies.