

Transcript

The Jesus Story - A Sinful Woman Forgiven

There's a famous woman in the Bible, and she is famous even though her name is never mentioned.

Now, the full story of this woman takes just fourteen verses and we find this in Luke 7 verses 36-50. She is a woman who brought an alabaster jar of fragrant oil to Jesus.

Her story is one of the most powerful stories of repentance and forgiveness, and one that also demonstrates the mercy and kindness of God.

Luke describes this woman who anoints the feet of Jesus simply as: "a woman in the city, who was a sinner", and this anointing story takes place during a meal in Galilee.

The main figure in this story is the unnamed woman who never speaks. All we are told is that she was a sinner. We are not told just how she had earned this label of sinner. The possibilities include that she was a prostitute, an adulterer. Whatever she had done to earn this label, it was obvious enough to cause the Pharisee to react against her presence.

As we look a little closer at the things that surround this anointing by the sinful woman in Luke's gospel, we will find that this is a story of contrasts. We have a self-righteous Pharisee side by side with a sinful woman. The lack of formal hospitality from a Pharisee, set against overflowing love of a sinful woman; and a Pharisee who thinks he can make it to heaven through his own righteous living, set against a sinful woman who knows her only hope is in the Mercy of God.

What I would like to do is to take these fourteen verses and find out just what we can learn from this story. First of all we can look at the scene that this story is set in, then we can take a closer look at the three main characters - the woman, the Pharisee, and then see how Jesus handles this situation.

This passage we shall be looking at here in Luke 7 is very similar to another story of Jesus being anointed by a woman, and is often confused and mixed up with it. If we are to understand the story of Jesus anointed by a sinful woman, we need to disentangle it from the other story of Jesus' being anointed at Bethany near the end of his ministry.

These two events are confused easily enough because of several similarities: Jesus is anointed with expensive perfume. He is anointed by a woman. The anointing takes place in the house of a man named Simon.

But the differences between the stories show that the passage that we are looking at here is a completely different incident from that found in the story of the anointing at Bethany. This incident took place about half-way through Jesus' Galilean Ministry. It's a separate anointing from what occurred in Bethany more than a year later.

Here are just a few of the differences with. The anointing at Bethany. This anointing takes place at the home of Simon the Leper, not Simon the Pharisee. The woman doing the anointing at Bethany is not spoken of as sinful, but actually appears to be

Mary, Lazarus' sister. The meaning of the anointing at Bethany is to announce the burial of Jesus'. And, the criticism is by disciples, especially Judas, and it is about the value of the perfume that is "wasted," rather than as a criticism of the morals of the woman doing the anointing.

There are three main characters in the story that we are looking at: the woman, the Pharisee and Jesus. The whole account of what took place is found in just fourteen verses. What I would like to do is to at these characters one at a time. But first of all an overview of the whole situation. The circumstances that this story is set in.

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.

One evening a Pharisee, named Simon, invited Jesus to dinner. We don't know for certain what his motives were. Based on this story, it is obvious, that he was no fan of Jesus, he just watched Jesus with a critical eye.

It helps us just to know what a Pharisee was; Jesus considered Pharisaical pride a greater danger than immorality. Where the confessed sinner acknowledged her failures, the self-righteous Pharisee boasted his worth.

The Pharisees were a group of strict fundamentalists who believed in keeping the letter of the law in minute detail. Generally speaking, you could say that Pharisees were very religious, but not very spiritual. From what we read about them in the New Testament, It is obvious that many thought they were better than everyone else.

Then there would be the question: why would Simon be inviting Jesus to the meal? He did not invite Jesus as a social equal and he did not provide the usual amenities for Him: the ritual foot washing; a kiss of greeting; the anointing of oil for the head. He invited Him out of curiosity. He had heard that Jesus was a prophet and he wanted to see for himself who this questionable celebrity was.

The first character that we are going to look at is the woman. This is what we read in Verse 37:

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.

What a statement that is: to wash his feet with her tears. It would be very difficult to describe just what this woman was feeling at this time. She would have gone through a whole series of emotions from shame and repentance, through to gratitude, love and joy; and they would all find the same wonderful relief.

The word for "wash" simply means a "shower" of tears. Just look at the woman who loved Jesus so much. She had evidently lived a wicked life but she heard Jesus' teaching about God's forgiveness. She knew that in some way Jesus himself was the saviour, and she was so grateful but it was not enough for her to feel thankful in herself.

She wanted to do something that showed Jesus how she valued him and his salvation.

She is not self-conscious of what she is doing. She does not care much about what others think. This sinful woman acted out of gratitude for being forgiven and she showed her love by anointing Jesus. She knew just how much she had been forgiven and this caused her to love more deeply. She had much love springing from a sense of much forgiveness. This is what Jesus said and He was the one who knew her heart:

47 “Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much.

Where she had met with Jesus before, or what words of His she had heard we just do not know. What we do know is they brought a sense of divine pardon to her guilty soul. It is really worth noting, no matter what opinion others may have had of this woman, Jesus saw her as a person. He did not reject her touch, refuse her kisses or condemn her motives. Jesus reassures the woman and tells her she is forgiven.

Of course she knew that already! That is the point of the story. She was forgiven already because of her faith, not because of her love; because she knew that she was forgiven much, and that was the reason that she was expressing her love to Jesus.

Verse 39 tells us about the second character that we are going to look at the Pharisee:

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.”

Here we find the reason that the Pharisee invited Jesus. Undoubtedly, his motive was either to entrap Jesus or to find some reason to accuse Him. The Pharisee thought he knew what the woman was, and the so-called prophet did not.

But Jesus knew the woman was a sinner, and he also knew Simon's thoughts. And Jesus was not answering anything that was said. The answer was, as the context shows, to the unspoken thoughts of the Pharisee. Jesus not only knew the thoughts of Simon, he also knew just what Simon is.

Simon is spiritually ignorant. He is filled with his own self-righteousness. He doesn't realize that he is as much a sinner as this woman. He may not have done precisely the things that she has done, but he has the same sinful human nature, and self-righteousness is as loathsome to God as the wickedness for which this woman is known. Simon is ungrateful, and ingratitude is hateful to God. Simon, a Pharisee, has invited Jesus to a dinner at Simon's house.

Like all cultures, there are certain 'rules' when someone comes to your house. In Jesus' day, three rituals were common: a kiss of greeting, washing of feet and anointing with oil. Simon, though, does not do any of these procedures. Simon has called Jesus – whose fame was widespread – to a social gathering with the town's intellectual and religious leadership. And Simon offends Jesus. Simon has set up Jesus for social shame. No Pharisee who respected Jesus would have done this.

Suddenly, an uninvited, unnamed woman appears who is described simply as a

“sinner in the city.” Without speaking, she weeps, wets Jesus’ feet with her tears, wipes them with her hair, kisses them, and anoints them with perfumed oil (verse 38).

In verse 39 We have Simon talking to himself:

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.”

Simon the Pharisee knew the woman the moment she approached Jesus out of the shadow. In the privacy of his heart, he began to judge not only the sinful woman but Jesus, too! As the display of worship and affection continued, “He said to himself, ‘If this man were a prophet’.

When Jesus says, “Simon, I have something to say to you” (v40), Jesus would be demonstrating his own willingness to talk about this woman, The very thing that Simon failed to do. Jesus then goes on to address Simon’s unspoken objection directly.

Mockingly, Jesus’ response proves exactly what Simon is questioning: Jesus does, in fact, know the character not only of the one who is touching him - the woman, but also of the one who is judging him suspiciously - Simon.

When we read this, we certainly see the generosity and love of this woman, but the much more pressing issue is the selfishness and self-centeredness of Simon.

The things that Jesus describes the woman as doing were customary for the host to do. Dirty feet from walking in sandals on dirt roads would be washed at the entrance. A drop of perfumed oil on the head would be refreshing. A kiss of greeting as respect. But Simon did none of that for Jesus, and apparently he didn't even consider it.

This does not show the Pharisee in a very good light. His negligence of concern toward Jesus exposed Simon's true spiritual bankruptcy. Here in verse 44, we have Jesus rebuking Simon for his lack of common courtesy:

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.

What a strange question for Jesus to ask. "Do you see this woman?" Jesus asked if Simon saw the woman. Of course he saw her. How could he not see her? He saw this woman just as clearly as anyone else in the room. He saw her brazen indiscretion. He saw her complete disregard for his honour as a Pharisee. Her violation of all acceptable practices and cultural norms.

What Jesus is really saying is: Simon, you are in no position to stand in judgement on this woman. She has done all those things that you as host failed to do. She came with perfume, and wept, and kissed Jesus' feet because she had already reached out

in faith and accepted the forgiveness of God that He offered in His teaching.

And here we find the ultimate reason for the woman's tears. They are tears of joy from a woman who is used to being treated as Simon had treated her, but who has now found acceptance in God's grace. She has had all her sins forgiven.

She had a debt that she could not pay, and she knew it. She understood just how great that debt was, so she also knew the greatness of the grace that had been bestowed on her. She came because she knew she was forgiven and that the weight of sin was lifted from her. The woman came out of gratitude; she came out of love, and that fits well with Jesus' explanation of her actions.

That is also why Jesus comments on her faith. He knew that she had already accepted His love, and was acting out of a heart of thankfulness. She had already grasped the forgiveness of God, and she somehow knew that the heart of the Father was being expressed to her through Jesus. No wonder she was in tears.

In verse forty, this is what we read.

40 And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you."

So he said, "Teacher, say it." I never cease to be amazed at the way that Jesus deals with people. Jesus had a wonderful way with words, the bible tells clearly. John in his gospel tells us; "No man ever spoke like this Man!" (John7v46). Mark simply tells us "And the common people heard Him gladly." (Mark 12v37).

Well Jesus had a message for Simon:

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

Jesus has picked up on Simon's attitude and thinking, and now He is going to tailor His remarks to suit Simon's personal issues and needs. In verse 41 Jesus tells the Parable of the Two Debtors

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."

The parable of the creditor and two debtors is a simple and straightforward; a parable told by Jesus, to the Pharisee Simon, just to give a simple explanation for his reaction to the woman who weeps at his feet and pours ointment on them.

With this original parable it is absolutely essential that it is interpreted within its context, because Jesus is telling this parable for a personal reason, because of a particular situation. The parable and story not only belong together, the parable is tailor-made to describe and fit this specific occasion.

Now, there are at least three significant points to notice in this parable. First, it is

significant that there are two debtors, which, given the context, would appear to stand for Simon the Pharisee and the sinful woman. The debtor who owed the most would represent the sinful woman. The debtor who owed the least would represent Simon the Pharisee.

Second, It is significant that neither of the debtor's could repay the debt that was owed. The implication is that Simon was just as incapable of paying his debt as the sinful woman was of paying hers. However small he may have thought his debt was in relationship to her debt of sin, he really was in the same desperate situation she was in.

Third, It is significant that both debtors were freely forgiven. Simon should have realized that whether he viewed his own sins as being as great as the woman's or not, forgiveness for both can only come as a free gift and not something that is earned.

Simon definitely needed to consider that despite his own thinking of himself as a little sinner rather than a big one, he still couldn't pay his own sin debt, and so he still needed the grace of God.

All of this raises a question: did the woman really have a greater debt of sin than Simon? Or is it just that she was more aware of her sinful condition, whereas Simon was not? The story is not about Simon having just a little sin in his life and only needing a little forgiveness; it's about Simon's lack of perception of his sin. His pride is just as damning as the woman's sin of promiscuity. Pride had forfeited Simon's opportunity for forgiveness.

It's not about the amount of sin, it is all about the acknowledgment of sin and thankfulness for forgiveness. Jesus wanted the religious "in-crowd" to know that they had just as high a debt of sin as those "social outcasts" they loved to hate.

So in this story Jesus asks Simon, "Do you see this woman?" It is as if Jesus is saying, "Take another look, Simon. Simon saw this woman but did he really see her? Certainly not the way Jesus did. The purpose and message of this parable is based on Jesus' desire to explain to Simon his reaction to the woman at his feet. Very simply, she is repenting of her many sins - that's why she is weeping - and she is acting this way because of her great debt.

Any interpretation that goes beyond Jesus' purpose for telling this parable would be taking his message out of context. Jesus is saying this woman is acting this way because she had a great debt that has been forgiven. If the woman didn't believe that she had been be forgiven, she would never have attempted to approach Jesus.

This parable asks a question about two debtors. It uses the symbol of debts for sins. Jesus tells a story about two forgiven debtors, who differ only by the amount they owe, Both the debts are significant because both are beyond the debtors' means to repay. The two debtors had nothing to pay with. But the creditor forgave them both.

Forgiveness is all about grace. There is nothing the two debtors could do to earn their pardon. When they could not pay, so he cancelled the debt of both. "Now which of them will love him the most?" Jesus asked. And, Simon answered: "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And Jesus said to him, "You have judged rightly."

There we have a short story, an easy question, and a simple answer. Simon judged, "She is a sinner.". "No, Simon," Jesus replied, "she was a sinner." In this lies a major clue to the difference between the two people. Simon and the woman had something in common, according to the parable: both were debtors to the same creditor, and neither could meet their obligation.

What does all of this mean, Simon? By all accounts, it means that her debt has already been cancelled. While you see a sinner, I see someone who is filled with love gratitude because her sins have been forgiven Jesus asks Simon to take another look. Do you see this woman?

Jesus' words challenged the way Simon saw the woman. His words should cause him to consider whether or not he had misjudged her. This sinful woman loves me from the depths of her heart. She has shown her love for me. That is the proof that her sins have been forgiven. Her love is the proof that she knows That her sins have been forgiven, And that she is accepted by God. The greater the sins God forgives, the greater will be the sinner's love for God.

Sin is like a debt. If a man knows his sins are great, he will be more grateful for forgiveness. If a man considers his sins to be small, he will be less grateful for forgiveness.

Notice that a man's gratitude depends not on how sinful he actually is, but on how sinful he believes he is. Notice also that whether our sins are great or small, we can never pay back our debt to God by our own righteousness. Only by God's mercy can our debts be forgiven.

With God there is no such thing as Great Sins and Small Sins - Sin is Sin. It is far better that a man considers his sins to be very great, because that is how God considers them.

We can wear out our lives seeking a self-righteousness that we will never find, or we can live our lives accepting the righteousness Jesus declares we have by believing in Him. The first one pursues what can't be found, the second finds what can't be lost if we continue in faith. If you will embrace this truth, it will transform Your Life.

Our Passion for God will only be equal to our understanding of how much we have been forgiven and the price that was paid for our salvation. He paid a debt He did not owe. I owed a debt I could not pay.

Romans 3v10:

10 As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one.

Romans 3v23:

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Romans 6v23:

23 The wages of sin is death,

In the same verse we have the good news but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Our Eternal Salvation does not depend on how good or bad we are, but have received the gift of God's Forgiveness.