

## **“The Forgiving Savior”**

*November 17, 2019*

Luke 7:36-50

### **I. Introduction**

In [Luke 19:10](#) Jesus said, “**The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.**” This included the self-righteous members of the religious elite as well as the outcasts of society—as [Romans 3:23](#) says, “**All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**” Jesus had also just taught the disciples in [Luke 6:35](#) to “**love your enemies, do good to them.**” So, in keeping with both of these teachings, Jesus accepted the invitation to go to Simon the Pharisee’s house for a meal.

Luke records two other occasions when Jesus had a meal at a Pharisee’s house: [Luke 11:37-54](#) and [Luke 14:1-24](#). In both of these cases, the Pharisees had no interest in learning from Jesus. They had already rejected Him and His message, they were merely trying to gather evidence that they could use to condemn Him. For example, after the meal in Luke 11, Luke wrote in [Luke 11:53-54](#) that “**the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to oppose him fiercely and to besiege him with questions, waiting to catch him in something he might say.**” Even before this meal in today’s Scripture, the Pharisees were concerned about this prophet from Nazareth—[turn to Luke 6:6-11](#).

All four Gospels have an account of a woman anointing Jesus’ feet. Luke’s story is different from those in [Matthew 26:6-13](#); [Mark 14:3-9](#); [John 12:1-11](#). The story recorded in Luke took place in Galilee while the other anointing took place in Bethany. This anointing happened early in Jesus’ ministry while the other event happened during Passion Week at the house of Simon the leper not Simon the Pharisee.

In Luke’s story we see several things: a sinful woman who had been transformed through faith in Jesus; we see Jesus evangelizing a Pharisee and his friends that had been invited to a meal. Finally, we see Jesus demonstrating His power to forgive sins and transform lives by using the very type of person the Pharisees despised the most. Actually, the self-righteous, hypocritical religious leaders were the worst

possible sinners; people who believe they are not lost and think they do not need redemption cannot be saved.

## II. The Scene

The scene is set in [verse 36](#). One of the Pharisees in Galilee invited Jesus to have dinner with him and his friends. We aren't told about the motive for Simon's invitation. Perhaps it was sincere. But considering the conversation and especially the things that weren't done for this special Guest, it seems more likely that this was an activity to gather incriminating evidence. No self-respecting Pharisee would spend any amount of time with a blasphemer ([Luke 5:21](#)), except to do him harm.

In Jesus' day, when a guest arrived at a person's home, there were some common courtesies that were done to make the guest feel welcome. First, his feet would be washed. A guest's feet would be caked in dirt after walking in sandals on the dusty roads. So, the lowliest of slaves would greet him at the door with a basin of water and then wash and dry his feet. Following the washing of the guest's feet, the host would come and greet him with a kiss to make him feel welcome and let him know that he was an honored guest. Finally, the head of the guest would be anointed with some sweet smelling, cooling oil.

All these things went together to say, "*You are welcome in my home.*" But when Jesus visited the home of Simon the Pharisee, none of these things happened. Luke wrote that Jesus reclined at the table without His feet being washed, without the customary kiss, or the anointing of oil. By his actions, Simon was saying that inviting Jesus to dinner was necessary but just barely tolerated.

## III. The Two Characters

The story revolves around two main characters: the sinful woman and the self-righteous man.

**A. The Sinful Woman** It was customary in that day for outsiders to hover around during banquets so they could watch the "*important people*" and hear the conversations. Since everything was open, anyone could enter the place where the dinner was being held and even speak to the guest. One uninvited person was this woman who Luke said "*lived a sinful life*"—most likely she was a prostitute with a bad

reputation in the town. This was the 1<sup>st</sup> character: the sinful woman. She probably brought this expensive perfume to anoint Jesus' head. So, waiting for her opportunity, she stood behind Jesus at His feet as He reclined at the meal. In the beginning she wasn't recognized—perhaps it was the lighting—because if she had been recognized, she would have been ordered to leave immediately.

As she stood behind Jesus wondering how she was going to get to His head, she began to weep. Because of where she was standing, “she began to wet His feet with her tears.” Perhaps, bending over as she wept, she noticed that Jesus' feet had not been washed, so “she wiped them with her hair.” Washing the feet of another person was considered degrading, but what was even more shocking was the fact that she was letting down her hair. For a Jewish woman to do that in public was considered indecent and immoral. But she wasn't concerned with the shame she might face from others.

After she finished washing Jesus' feet, the woman “kissed them.” The word Luke used for “kissing” is the same word he used in [Luke 15:20](#) when the prodigal son is welcomed home by his father with a kiss. Just like the father welcoming back his son, the woman's kissing of Jesus' feet was an expression of deep affection. Then, unwilling or unable to wait, she anointed the Lord's feet with the perfume. In the midst of those seeking to dishonor Jesus, she paid Him the greatest honor she could.

**B. The Self-righteous Man** While all this was going on, the 2<sup>nd</sup> character. Simon the Pharisee—the self-righteous man—was watching. He was greatly offended by what was going on because it was obvious that all the things he had failed to do to make Jesus welcome, this sinful woman was now doing.

Simon was also embarrassed, both for himself and for his guests. People had been saying that Jesus was a great Prophet, but He certainly wasn't showing any prophetic discernment as He allowed such a sinful woman to anoint His feet. Simon knew what kind of woman she was. So he judged Jesus' reaction as being ignorant. This was proof to him that Jesus could not be who He claimed to be. Simon reasoned, “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.” *How could Jesus tell them things they did not know if He did not even know what*

*they knew about this woman?”* Simon continued to reason that “*no sensible religious teacher, especially one claiming to be the Messiah, would ever allow such a woman to touch Him.*” The Pharisee was both disgusted and satisfied at the same time. He was disgusted by what he was witnessing and satisfied that Jesus’ ignorance was proof that He was no prophet.

#### **IV. The Parable**

But Jesus proved that He was indeed a prophet by reading Simon’s thoughts. Jesus knew more about the woman than Simon did. When Simon looked at her, all he saw was a prostitute, a sinner, someone to be shunned. But Jesus saw her as a repentant sinner, a precious soul seeking some way to express her love and appreciation for what Jesus had come to mean to her. Verse 37 in the NIV says she “**had lived a sinful life;**” verse 47 says, “**Her many sins have been forgiven.**” She had already heard Jesus and had already believed Him. She was forgiven and she had come to thank Him for her freedom and forgiveness from sin.

To make His point, Jesus told a parable. It didn’t deal with the amount of sin in a person’s life but with the awareness of that sin in his heart. How much sin must a person commit to be a sinner? Jesus said that there were two debtors. One owed about 2 months wages and the other about a year and a half worth of wages. Jesus said, “**Neither of them had the money to pay him, i.e., the moneylender, back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?**”

Simon probably hesitated before he gave an answer. This story was unreal—no one would forgive a debt, let alone 2 of them. Secondly, he was probably trying to figure out why Jesus was telling him the story at all. He couldn’t see any point to it. But suspecting that Jesus would somehow embarrass him if he gave the wrong answer, Simon gave the obvious answer, “**I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven,**” and he got it right. The principle was simple and obvious: whoever is forgiven the most will love the most—great love comes from great forgiveness.

#### **V. The Forgiving Savior**

Then Jesus, the forgiving Savior, turned to the woman and applied this principle to her and Simon. Addressing Simon, Jesus contrasted the woman's obvious love for Him with Simon's cold indifference. Jesus pointed out how the woman had cared for Him in a way His host had not. Jesus mentioned the washing of His feet, the greeting she gave in kissing His feet, and the anointing of His feet with perfume. None of which Simon had done. Instead, Simon had insulted Jesus by failing to offer the normal courtesy of providing water for His feet or greeting Him with the customary kiss.

Continuing to address Simon, Jesus said, **"Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."** The woman had been forgiven before she came to the house that day. This was her opportunity to show her gratitude and love to the One who had forgiven her. Her demonstration of love for Jesus gave clear evidence of her transformed life—**James 2:18** says, **"Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do."** There was also an implied warning to Simon, who probably saw himself as a "little sinner:" *"Your love may not be great because you have not appreciated the depth of forgiveness God has made available to you. Instead, you judge this woman in order to gain a good feeling about yourself."*

**"Then Jesus said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven'—actually, the Greek says 'have been forgiven.'"** Those gathered at the table were quick to recognize that Jesus took it upon Himself to forgive her sins instead of saying God had forgiven her. Just as the Pharisees had recognized in **Luke 5:21**, Jesus was claiming to be God. Jesus' parting words **"to the woman. 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace,"** made it clear that her love and the good deeds she had done to Him were the result of her salvation, not its cause.

Salvation is by faith alone. Jesus said in **John 5:24**, **"Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life."** **Turn to Galatians 2:15-16.** And, as Jesus said, this salvation by faith brings eternal peace—

Romans 15:13 says, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

## VI. Conclusion

It’s so easy to fall into the trap of the Pharisees. We are all good people. We don’t go around shooting people or stealing money or breaking other laws. We do good things: we go to church regularly, we donate time and money to charities, we make up boxes for Operation Christmas Child, we pray for those in need. Actually, God could use one of us for a poster child. Sadly, like the Pharisees, we forget verses like Isaiah 64:6, “All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.” Or as Romans 3:12 puts it, “There is no one who does good, not even one.”

Instead of comparing ourselves with those around us—we are all sinners, Hebrews 12:2 says, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.” So, what about Jesus? Turn to Isaiah 53:1-9. As Philippians 2:6-8 puts it, Jesus, “being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death-- even death on a cross!” Because of His amazing love, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, left heaven and all its grandeur to come to earth with the specific purpose of dying on a cross for your sins and my sins. Romans 10:9 says that if one makes Jesus his Lord and Savior, that person is saved from an eternity in hell and instead will spend eternity in heaven with the One that loves him or her so much.

Like the woman in today’s Scripture our love for Jesus should fill us to overflowing. We should be ready to show this love regardless of what those around us may think or do. In John 14:15 Jesus said, “If you love me, keep my commands.” Do you? It is their love for the Lord Jesus Christ that is the believers’ most powerful witness to the lost world. Is your love of God and His commands, including

loving others as yourself, as obvious to those around you as the woman's love for Christ was obvious to Simon and those in his house? Putting it a different way, if you were taken to court, would it be possible to prove that you are a Christian by the things you do as well as what you say? When it comes your time to stand before Jesus Christ, are you going to hear, **“Well done, thou good and faithful servant”** (Matthew 25:21)?