

Luke 7:36 – 50

³⁶ Now one of the Pharisees was requesting him to dine with him, and he entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. ³⁷ And there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that he was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, ³⁸ and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing his feet and anointing them with the perfume. ³⁹ Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet he would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching him, that she is a sinner.' ⁴⁰ And Jesus answered him, 'Simon, I have something to say to you.' And he replied, 'Say it, Teacher.' ⁴¹ 'A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So 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 judged correctly.' ⁴⁴ 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 she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not anoint my head with oil, but she anointed my feet with perfume. ⁴⁷ For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.' ⁴⁸ Then he said to her, 'Your sins have been forgiven.' ⁴⁹ Those who were reclining at the table with him began to say to themselves, 'Who is this man who even forgives sins?' ⁵⁰ And he said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.'

Historical and Cultural Background

- *The Pharisees* were a right-wing political and religious group in Israel focusing on Jewish nationalism and religious piety. They believed that Jerusalem and the Temple had become corrupt because the Jewish leadership in the capital collaborated with Rome. Many also supported militant, revolutionary groups of Jews who were trying to retake the capital and oust the Romans. They Pharisees focused on trying to stay religiously pure by following the Jewish Mosaic Law.
- *A denarii* was a coin that was worth about a day's wages.

Questions

1. Describe the tension between Simon the Pharisee and the sinful woman.
 - a. Who is named in the story? Who is not? What does that mean about social prominence?
 - b. How would Simon the Pharisee describe his identity? Being part of the right crowd that is supposedly truly Jewish, right, proper, upstanding.
 - c. What has his life likely been like?
 - d. What is the woman's identity built around? How would this woman describe her identity?
 - e. What has her life likely been about?
 - f. What was the alabaster vial of perfume worth? If she was a prostitute, would she have used it for her profession?
 - g. When did women typically let down their hair? On their wedding night, for their husbands only.
 - h. What does it mean that she lets down her hair in public to wipe Jesus' feet? That she is totally devoting herself to him.
 - i. Why is she so emotional at Jesus' feet?
 - j. What kind of tensions does her presence cause at the gathering?
 - k. Does Simon the Pharisee speak out loud, or keep his thoughts to himself? Simon talks to himself in v.39. Notice how Jesus 'answered' Simon. How is this similar to what we've seen Jesus do earlier in the story of the paralytic?
2. Describe the tension between Simon the Pharisee and Jesus.
 - a. Why has Simon not treated Jesus with due respect and honor as a guest? He believes he's the one who should be honored.
 - b. Simon thinks Jesus is ignorant of the woman's character and background. He's guessing into Jesus' internal knowing. What's the irony of the situation?
 - c. What does Jesus' parable show? That the woman loves him and Simon doesn't. The internal condition of both of them!
 - d. How does Jesus turn the tables on Simon? Exposing what Simon was thinking. Demonstrating he is a real prophet, a greater one than Simon thought. He not only knows who this woman is, he knows what Simon was thinking. And he makes her identity as forgiven superior to his identity of self-reliance.
 - e. Why is the self-concept of Simon the Pharisee so attractive and yet so dangerous? Why does he refuse to believe Jesus? What's in it for him to continue in unbelief?
3. How does the relationship between the woman and Jesus build?
 - a. Trace the theme of welcoming through the story. Who welcomes who?
 - b. What happens when the woman welcomes Jesus? He restructures the party around her. He says, "This is where the party is really happening." This is awesome: We come to Jesus with basically nothing, owing stuff and coming with less than nothing, but he takes that and turns it into a private party.
 - c. How would you describe the faith of the woman?
 - d. When was the last time we saw the word "faith?" When Jesus praised the centurion for believing his word and rescued the centurion's servant from death. In what sense has this woman been rescued from death? In what sense is being forgiven of sin like being rescued from death?
4. Jesus knowing us. Building the themes through Luke's Gospel
 - a. How does Jesus teach on forgiveness of sins here? How is this similar or different to how he taught about it when he healed the paralytic man? There is no miracle, but there is supernatural knowing (like 5:20-22). Jesus demonstrates that he is a true prophet of God.
 - b. What does Jesus want both of their identities to be built around? Being forgiven, and loving him.
 - c. How does he know where our identities are? He knows unerringly better than we do, and read our hearts and minds.
 - d. Why does the question of "Who is Jesus?" lead immediately to "And who am I?" How does this passage make you feel?
 - e. If it's hard to believe that you're in debt by \$50,000,000 vs. in debt by \$50, where do those self-perceptions come from?