

The Parables of Jesus

- The Creditor and the Two Debtors

(Luke 7:40-43)

This parable is found only in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus was most likely still in the "city" of Nain or its vicinity. As the text states in Luke chapter 7, Jesus entered the "city" of Nain. He saw a funeral procession which He stopped and proceeded to raise a widow's son from

the dead. (Luke 7:11-15) After this, John the Baptist's disciples came on behalf of John (as he was now in prison) to ask Jesus if He truly was "the One." Jesus told them to go back and report to John "*all that they have seen and heard.*" As John's disciples left, Jesus proceeded to illuminate to all that were present that John the Baptist was the one who would come to "prepare the way" for the Messiah, which everyone knew He was implying that He was the Messiah.

Jesus then continued with His parable of the "Children in the Market Place" and His teaching concerning the stiff-necked attitude of the religious leaders to both John and Himself. Those were the words that ignited the early stages of the religious leaders' disdain and disapproval of Jesus. They began to see Jesus as a threat. They made the decision to reject the message of both John the Baptist and Jesus (Luke 7:19-35).

After this, we see in Luke 7:36, that Jesus was then invited by a Pharisee, whose name was Simon, to come to his home and have something to eat. There is no mention that Jesus traveled anywhere else prior to this so we can assume that this was the home of a Pharisee named Simon who lived in or in the vicinity of the "city" of Nain. Invited were other people, possibly Pharisees and other religious leaders (verse 49) as well as Jesus' disciples. Then something quite out of the ordinary, actually, extraordinary takes place. Let's "set the stage," if you would allow me to use some "poetic license."

Just close your eyes and envision a home with people gathered in it. This house belongs to a Pharisee so it most likely is a home in which one could tell that whoever lived in it was a person of some wealth. It is a small gathering of close friends and colleagues. The owner of the house had invited a well known person whom they have heard much of but know very little about. Everyone is gathered in their little cliques in different areas of the room and the "special guest" is sitting by a table. This "special guest" may be chatting with some of the other guests when all of a sudden all eyes turn to the door. Someone has just entered the house. It is someone definitely who was not invited. Someone very much disapproved of by **almost** everyone in the room. A woman had entered the house. Not just any woman but a "sinful woman."

This was unheard of in this type of setting. The woman is dressed in apparel that was most likely not suited for this type of occasion. Nor for that matter, in the opinion of most of the guests, would not be dressed for any occasion that they would be seen at – at least publicly. The woman comes into the room in a slow, cautious but yet deliberate manner. She is trying not to draw the attention of anyone but knowing full well, unfortunately, everyone in the room has noticed. However, this does not deter her. The room that was filled with highly intellectual, philosophical and "religious" discussions has gone eerily and totally quiet for the moment. Yes, you could hear the proverbial "pin drop."

Than to the surprise of all, the woman makes her way and sets herself down just behind the "special guest." The woman has in her hands a beautiful, but curious box. All eyes are still focused on the uninvited person. Now, in the corners of the room we notice that people begin to murmur and begin to make mockingly, little smirks and gestures to each other concerning this uninvited guest – this sinful woman. Then they begin to do the same concerning the "special guest" who the woman is now kneeling behind. Everyone is anxiously waiting to see what will happen next and how this situation will unfold.

You would be thinking, by this time, that the host of this little gathering would be embarrassed and would rush to the aide of the "special guest." Instead, the host is one of those in the corner with a little smirk on his face just waiting to see what the "special guest" would do. What happens next is truly extraordinary.

As we return to our text in Luke 7:36-39, we must keep in mind two things. First of all, this is not the same account that is mentioned in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and John. Those accounts are of the same event concerning when Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha, "prepared Jesus for His burial." That took place towards the end of Jesus' ministry, a little over a week prior to His crucifixion. The second thing to remember is that, as mentioned previously, a "woman" had entered the house. We must understand the culture of that time. This gathering was for men only – the religious leaders and Pharisees, as well as Jesus, who was invited, along with His disciples. There were no women invited to such gatherings. That would be inappropriate and against protocol.

There are some that think that this woman may have been "Mary Magdalene," whom Jesus had set free of seven demons. Mary (Miriam) came from the village of Migdala, which is a village near the "city" of Nain. The name Mary Magdalene literally means "Miriam from Migdala." The common thinking is that Mary Magdalene was most likely a prostitute because of the fact that she was delivered from seven demons.

However, you do not have to be a harlot to have seven demons. There is a very good possibility that Mary Magdalene may have been a successful woman of business (not a harlot) who was wealthy and well known within her community. It was also quite possible that she and many of the other women who traveled with Jesus, helped finance Jesus' ministry because of their successful financial situations. (Please read Luke 8:2) Also, in our account, we are not told this woman's name, yet in Luke 8:2 Mary Magdalene is specifically mentioned.

Whoever this woman may have been and who she was is not really of much importance to our account and its teaching. That may be the reason why her name is not given. The only thing that is truly of important is that we see an individual expressing a correct "attitude of heart" towards Jesus for who He is. She was willing to go someplace where she may not have been welcomed nor seemed to belong. She was out of her "comfort zone." However, she chose to "boldly go where she had never gone before." Her heart was to simply get to Jesus. It did not matter to her what others may have been thinking.

The "traditional view" of this account is that there was a woman (whoever it may have been) whom Jesus had a previous encounter with in which He had set her free from some type of demonic activity or healed her from some other issue. In this "traditional view," this woman comes in to the house and performs an act of beautiful worship to the One (Jesus) who has set her free because she had a heart that was filled with gratitude. Now, I am not saying that this "traditional view" of looking at this account is incorrect. However, if we read the text, we are given no indication that this woman and Jesus ever met previously. There is no mention of her being "set free" or being healed of some disease or malady which prompted her to come and do what she did to Jesus.

What we do know was that she was looked upon as a "sinner" by Simon. To him and to the others in the room, she may have been known to be "a lady of the night" shall we say, or at the least a woman of "ill repute." We can infer this from Simon as he thinks to himself that if Jesus was indeed a prophet He, "... would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him..." But then again, Simon and many of the Pharisees thought everyone was a "sinner" except them and those that had met their own standards of approval. This woman therefore would also be considered "unclean" because of her reputation of being a "sinner." How could Jesus allow Himself to be touched by this "unclean, sinful" woman? Just by touching Jesus, Simon thought, this woman would make Jesus unclean. Surely, Jesus knew this. If not, then this would prove that Jesus was not who He said He was and He would definitely not be a prophet.

The question that comes to my mind is, "Why was she even there?" What prompted her to come to this house where she knew she would not be welcome? Obviously, she knew Jesus was going to be there and she obviously came because of Him. She also obviously, came prepared to do something – she had come with an alabaster box. Whatever the reason was, we are not told. Perhaps that is not by accident. This was

a very personal decision made by this woman. Yes, she was a sinner. Hey, everybody there was a sinner except Jesus, only they would not “own up” to it or they were blind to the fact. That is exactly the point. This woman knew she was a sinner but she saw someone who was not. She recognized something different about this Man and her heart was just driven and drawn to Him. She recognized her need for this Man. If we take a good look at our text and what this woman was doing, I believe, we can see a wonderful expression of the scripture that teaches *“blessed are the poor in spirit...”* (Matthew 5:3) This woman truly was recognizing her need for this Man, this Jesus – the Son of God. In this she was developing a true love towards Him – not for what He has done but just for who He is.

As she is now kneeling behind Jesus, she opens up the alabaster box. The box was filled with a sweet ointment – a mixture of myrrh and perfumed oil - very expensive as well as refreshing. She begins to pour it upon Jesus’ feet. She begins to weep. Why was she weeping? Could it possibly have been because as she came into the presence of Jesus, the presence of a holy God, she recognized and became overwhelmed by her own sinful state? Yet, Jesus did not push her away. Were these tears of sorrow and despair? They may very well have been tears of sorrow – but not of despair. Rather could they have been tears of true repentance? This brings to remembrance the scripture which follows the verse, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit...”* which is *“Blessed are they that mourn...”* (Matthew 5:4)

Her tears fall upon His feet. She wipes His feet with her hair. Hair that may once have been a symbol of her sinfulness now turned into a tool of true repentance. She may have been washing Jesus’ feet with her tears but at the same time something else was beginning to be washed – her heart. She kisses His feet, which in most cultures represents a true humbling of one’s self. Could this be an expression of the scripture which states, *“Blessed are the meek...”*(Matthew 5:5)

Simon, whose house they were in, as you can imagine, was enraged and became indignant at this whole scenario. First of all “this woman, this sinner,” enters his house, uninvited and unannounced. According to his “tradition” this would now make His whole house “unclean.” Now the real motive and attitude of Simon's heart is revealed. He did not invite Jesus to his home because he believed in who Jesus was but for other reasons - reasons that may not have been quite so innocent. Jesus was gaining popularity with the people but He was just beginning to be thought of as a threat by the Pharisees. The "rumblings" of disapproval were beginning and getting stronger. Certainly, the scenario unfolding in Simon’s house may now possibly be helping their cause against Jesus.

Simon then says *“within himself,”* that if Jesus was indeed a prophet, He would have known who this woman “was.” The interesting thing to note here is that Simon “thought to himself” that Jesus was not a prophet because he thought Jesus could not discern or know what this woman was. Yet, Jesus knew what Simon was thinking and answered his objections before Simon had a chance to say anything. This in itself should have proven to Simon that Jesus was indeed a “prophet.”

Jesus, then addresses and answers Simon’s “thoughts” with our parable as found in Luke 7:40-43 - *“And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.”*

Notice how Jesus interacted with Simon. From the text we see that Jesus was turned towards Simon and speaking to him. The woman was still behind Jesus doing what she was doing. Jesus had an exchange with Simon that allowed Simon to actually answer His own question. The problem we see in this exchange was that Simon had pre-judged the woman as a “sinner,” which she was. However, He failed to see His own sin and that he was just as much a sinner.

Jesus, then in Luke 7:44-45, reproves Simon concerning his own hospitality, or rather lack of hospitality. However, remember previously, we mentioned that Jesus was turned towards Simon and speaking to him. But notice in verse 44, Jesus now turns towards the woman and now Simon is behind Him. Hmmm.... Let's pause and think on that for a moment.

As our text states, Simon did not even do the most basic of the customary greeting of a guest that would enter his home. The custom was to at least have a water basin at the entrance so that the guests could "wash their feet" from the dust of the road and be comfortable. Something that Simon as the host did not do. He obviously really did not have any honor or respect for Jesus. His invitation to Jesus to come to his home was all under false pretenses and misrepresentations. Jesus of course knew this but accepted the invitation and went anyway. He knew what was going to take place. He used it as a "teaching" moment, both to those in the house but most importantly to His disciples who were present as well as to us, today.

As He is now turned towards the woman, Jesus goes on to tell Simon that this woman came to Him and wanted to be with Him because she had the correct attitude of heart. She recognized her need for Him. Simon did not. This woman had a heart of sincerely seeking after God with a once hardened heart that now was melting into a heart of true repentance. Simon's heart was hardened and it remained hardened even when Jesus spoke His parable and Simon answered correctly. He refused to hear or should we say he chose not to have "ears to hear."

In Luke 7:47-50, Jesus proceeds to give the explanation of the parable and reveals the real problem that Simon had. Remember, Jesus is now facing the woman as he is really speaking to her. *"Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."*

In His explanation, Jesus cuts to the heart of the matter which was just that – a person's heart. Those who recognize within their heart their need for forgiveness and then, in faith, runs to the one who can forgive them and set them free will be forgiven. Jesus paid the price for all sin. The only "sin" that anyone in the world is now accountable for is sin of "rejecting and denying" Jesus for who He is and what He has done. (John 16:9) That is why Jesus states that even Simon who still rejects Him – his sin would ultimately be forgiven at the cross. Simon's problem, at least at this point, was that he didn't believe he needed a Savior to set him free from sin. After all, Simon did not even believe that he was a sinner. To put it bluntly, Simon was hard hearted, spiritually blind, deceived and lost in his own misguided ways and traditions.

Simon and the others failed to grasp and understand that to be set free from any "debt of sin" is no small matter. They were so self-righteous that they did not think that they were even capable of sin. They were above being capable of sin simply because they were "Pharisees" and religious leaders and "children of Abraham." Unfortunately, they could not see their own sin and wickedness of their own heart. Simon and the others did not grasp, nor possibly think, that Isaiah 53:6 would be referring to them when Isaiah prophesied, *"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way..."* The scriptures also tell us in Romans 3:23 that *"...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* Both of these scriptures, one found in the Jewish scriptures and the other in the New Testament, point to Jesus who would come, and did indeed come, to take away all the iniquities and sins of everyone in the world. The key is to believe in your heart and confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord of your life and He is the one who saved you from the consequence of sin - eternal separation from God, the Father.

The scripture tells us in James 4:17, *"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."* This was Simon's and the other religious leaders' problem. They knew the scriptures. They knew the Word of God. They knew Isaiah 53:6. However, they did not live it nor did they believe it. They "turned to

their own way,” just as Isaiah had prophesied. They placed their traditions above God’s commandments. They did not recognize how great their own sin was.

Through her heart of recognizing her need for God, the woman in our account had a true encounter with Jesus. This led to the desire within her heart to “grieve” over her sinfulness. I would like to bring to remembrance the “results” of those scriptures we mentioned that are found in Matthew 5:3-4. *“Blessed are the poor in spirit **for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.** Blessed are they that mourn **for they shall be comforted.**”* The woman’s sins were now forgiven because she recognized her need for God and she recognized how sinful she was in the presence of a holy God. She had a true repentant “attitude of heart.”

Jesus told the woman, *“Thy sins are forgiven (because you believe in who I Am), go in peace, **your faith has saved you.**”* Of course we know that she could not have been saved until Jesus did what He did on the cross and at His resurrection. However, her heart was truly changed. She had experienced a true encounter with Jesus. We can infer that she became a disciple of His and ultimately became a born again child of God.

Obviously, this was not received well by those who were present in the house. They could not believe that someone who was such a sinner could be forgiven of her sins by Jesus or by anyone else for that matter. How dare Jesus say such a thing to her! This was totally going against all they believed and held to according to their “traditions.” To Simon and the others present, for Jesus to say to her that her sins were forgiven was akin to blasphemy. Only God can forgive sin. Well, yes, Jesus was literally declaring that He was God.

As we conclude, we can see that, yes, this account could be looked upon as a wonderful expression of worship by a person who loves Jesus and expresses a heart of true worship filled gratitude. However, I believe that through our discussion we can see that this account and the parable that Jesus uses is really more about a “sinner” who is drawn to a loving Savior. I believe it is more about the process of a person coming to Jesus, having their sin forgiven and being “saved.” It is about the process of salvation.

We see a person being drawn to their Savior because they recognize their need for Him. As they are drawn to Jesus through this recognition of their need for God, it brings them to a place of true repentance. They are comforted – forgiven. Jesus gladly receives such a heart. That person’s destiny is now found in the Kingdom of Heaven and all that it entails. They now have true peace because they are now “set at one again” with the God of their salvation. Praise the Lord!! Our debt has been forgiven and paid in full.