

The Faith of A Woman Who Loved Jesus

Lesson for April 21, 2024

Unit II: The Measure of Faith

Adult Topic: How Much Do You Love Me

Background Scripture: Luke 7:36-50

Printed Text: Luke 7: 7:36-39, 44-50

Key verse: “Jesus said to the woman, ‘Your faith has saved you; go in peace’.” (Luke 7:7, NIV)

When I was in South Africa, a fine, handsome Dutchman came into my service, and God laid His hand on him and convicted him of sin. The next morning, he went to the beautiful home of another Dutchman and said to him, “Do you recognize that old watch?”

“Why, yes,” answered the other. “Those are my initials; that is my watch. I lost it eight years ago. How did you get it, and how long have you had it?”

“I stole it,” was the reply.

“What made you bring it back now?”

“I was converted last night,” was the answer, “and I have brought it back first thing this morning. If you had been up, I would have brought it last night.”

Gipsy Smith, *The Bible Friend*

The humiliation of our public failures can make it difficult for a fresh start. How do we overcome the weight of judgment and scrutiny from those who refuse to see past our mistakes? Luke teaches about a woman whose great faith helped her rise above the rejection of others so that she might express her gratitude for Jesus’ love and forgiveness. (*Sunday School Commentary*, 2023-2024, Townsend Press, p. 305)

Key Terms

1. **Alabaster box** (verse 37) – A marble-like stone container which was used to preserve oils and perfumes. The woman had to break the narrow neck of the box and remove its wax seal in order to get the perfume out.
2. **Peace** (verse 50) – Freedom from disturbance; a period of tranquility.
3. **Sinful** (verse 37) – Tainted with, marked by, or full of sin.
4. **Tears** (verse 38) – The drops of salty liquid that come out of your eyes when you are crying. Evidence of sorrow.

Lesson Background

Chapter seven of the Book of Luke, as we described last week, continues Luke's pattern of describing Jesus' Galilean ministry by alternating stories with calls to faithfulness. This chapter presents six events which describe reactions to Jesus and His ministry. Today's lesson is event number four.

Luke 7:1–10 gives the first account of the faith of the generous centurion. The Gentile military commander trusts that Jesus is powerful enough to heal over distance. He does not expect such a prestigious teacher to condescend to enter his home. Jesus marvels at his faith and heals the man's servant.

Luke 7:11–17 records the first story of a powerless woman. While walking into Nain, Jesus raises the dead son of a widow. Luke does not record any interaction between the woman and Jesus beforehand. Nor does he note if those in the funeral procession recognize Him. The passage merely says He acts out of compassion.

Luke 7:18–23 contains the first of two stories about faith and John the Baptist. John is in prison and sends disciples to ask Jesus if He is the one they have waited for, or should they expect another. Jesus reassures John with descriptions of His ministry that demonstrate how He fulfills Old Testament prophecy.

In Luke 7:24–35, Jesus describes the two reactions the people have to John and Jesus' different lifestyles and their shared message. John fasts while Jesus feasts, but they both teach repentance. Those who know they need forgiveness don't care about the different lifestyles; they love the message. The religious leaders who think they need no forgiveness reject both. It is at this point that this week's lesson begins.

Lesson in Depth

I. Guess Who Came to Dinner (Luke 7:36-38)

We know nothing about Simon the Pharisee or the unnamed woman before or after this event. We know nothing more than this event tells us and what we can glean or speculate from this event about both of them. Since a Pharisee invited Jesus, he may have wanted the time a dinner would provide to discuss interpretations of the law with Jesus and other dinner guests; or, the dinner could have been planned to test Jesus.

Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him: This seems to show that relations between Jesus and the religious leaders were not yet totally antagonistic. There were some Pharisees who at least wanted a closer, look at Jesus.

And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner: Some suppose this was Mary Magdalene, but we have no evidence of this. In John 12:3 Mary of Bethany also anointed Jesus' feet with oil, but this was a separate incident.

Who was a sinner: This tells us more than that she was a sinner in the sense that all people are. She was a particularly notorious *sinner* – most suppose that she was a prostitute – the scriptures do not say. What we know is that her presence in the Pharisee’s home showed courage and determination. It was bold for a woman with a sinful reputation to come into the house of a Pharisee, but she was willing to do anything to express her love for Jesus.

Brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil: Both the container and the contents show that this was an expensive gift she brought to honor Jesus. Since Jesus later announced that her sins were forgiven (Luke 7:48-50), it may be that Jesus forgave her earlier, and would soon publicly declare her forgiven.

“Her service to Jesus was personal. She did it all herself, and all to him. Do you notice how many times the pronoun occurs in our text? (*she*, three times and *her* twice in Luke 7:37-38). She served Christ Himself. It was neither service to Peter, nor James, nor John, nor yet to the poor or sick of the city, but to the Master himself; and, depend upon it, when our love is in active exercise, our devotion will be immediately towards Christ — we shall sing to him, pray to him, teach for him, preach for him, live to him.” (Spurgeon)

And stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears: We can imagine that as the woman anointed Jesus’ feet with oil, she was overcome with emotion. With tears flowing from her eyes, she washed His feet with her tears, wiped them clean with her hair, and she kissed His feet repeatedly.

“People reclined on low couches at festive meals, leaning on the left arm with the head towards the table and the body stretched away from it. The sandals were removed before reclining.” (Morris)

Normally, this oil was used on someone’s head. “In all probability, the woman intended to anoint Jesus’ head with her perfume. But, because Jesus, like the other participants, reclined with His head toward the table, the closest the woman could get to Jesus was His feet.” (Pate)

The Pharisee (as Luke reported) certainly believed she still lived a sinful life; however, this thought would have been inconsistent with Jesus’ approach to repentant sinners. (For example, Jesus told the woman caught in adultery that He did not condemn her, and she should go and sin no more—John 8:11.) The repentant woman was too humble and respectful to interrupt Jesus’ meal in the Pharisee’s home by speaking publicly. To wash Jesus’ feet, she used the only water available to her, her tears. She wept and wept so profusely that her tears washed Jesus’ feet and she wiped them dry with her hair. In humility, she kissed Jesus’ feet and poured expensive perfume on them in adoration and worship. In some sense, because of the way Jesus had shown forgiving love for her, she treated Him as divine or more than human. Because Jesus was reclining to eat in the fashion of the day, she could come and kneel behind Jesus to wash, dry, and anoint His feet in humble adoration.

“To have her hair flowing would be deemed immodest...(she) kissed fervently, again and again.” (Bruce) We can only imagine how awkward this scene was, and how everyone silently watched the woman and her emotional display. No one said anything until Jesus broke the silence in the following verses.

II. A Study in Contrasts (Luke 7:39, 44-50)

When the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this: The host now became a questioner, possibly a hostile one.

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: The Pharisee believed the woman was a sinner by reputation. He did not know whether or not Jesus knew the woman or had met her before. He assumed Jesus knew nothing about her. He assumed that a true prophet would not allow himself to be touched by a sinful woman or any other sinner and become contaminated. He assumed that Jesus was not a true prophet, because Jesus was allowing a sinful woman to touch Him.

Simon the Pharisee doubted that Jesus was a prophet because he thought that Jesus was unable to see this woman's heart. Jesus will show that He can read the heart of man by exposing Simon's heart.

The lesson does not include verses 40-43, however what they reveal is important to understanding the message in the lesson we are studying. In Luke 7:40-43, Jesus tells a parable to Simon, the Pharisee who invited him to dinner. The parable is about two debtors: one owed a large sum of money, and the other owed a smaller amount. When neither could repay, the lender forgave both debts. Jesus then asks Simon which debtor would love the lender more. Simon answers that it would be the one who was forgiven more. Jesus confirms this and uses the parable to explain the woman's actions, implying that she, having been forgiven much, loves much.

Do you see this woman? Simon the Pharisee thought that *Jesus* was the one who could not see her. His thought was, “Jesus, don't you see this shameful woman associating so closely to You?” Jesus turned the thought around on Simon, saying, “*Do you see this woman?* Simon, do you see her love, her repentance, her devotion? That's what I see.”

Simon the Pharisee did not see the woman as she *was* (a humble sinner seeking forgiveness, pouring out love for Jesus) because he looked at her as she had *been* (a notorious sinner).

“It is not easy for us to blot out a past, and to free ourselves from all prejudice resulting from our knowledge of that past. Yet that is exactly what the Lord does. And He does so, not unrighteously, but righteously. He knows the power of His own grace, and that it completely cancels the past, and gives its own beauty to the soul.” (Morgan)

I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet: Simon the Pharisee denied Jesus the common courtesies from a host to a guest – washing the feet, a kiss for a greeting, and anointing the head with oil. Yet, he criticized the woman for giving these courtesies to Jesus.

Jesus noticed *neglect* and *appreciated* devotion. He did not reject deeply emotional devotion.

I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much: She wasn't forgiven *because* of her great love; her great love was evidence that she had been forgiven, probably privately on a prior occasion and now publicly.

Your sins are forgiven: If Jesus has already said that her sins *are forgiven* (Luke 7:47), yet He also said this directly to the woman. We need the healing power inherent in the words your sins are forgiven. It can be so hard for us to truly believe that we are forgiven; often, we must be *persuaded* of it.

Who is this who even forgives sins? Jesus had the authority to forgive the woman, and He was right to do so. She displayed *humility, repentance, trust, and love for* Jesus.

“Even the guests began to realize that Jesus was more than a prophet; He was divinely able to forgive an unclean woman.” (Pate)

Your faith has saved you: The key to her forgiveness was *faith* – it was her faith that saved her, because it was her faith that believed the words from Jesus your sins are forgiven. Faith enabled her to take the grace God gave to her.

Forgiveness is ready from God; there is no hesitation or shortage on His part. Our part is to come with humility and loving submission to Jesus, and to receive the forgiveness He offers by faith.

Go in peace: The woman came to Jesus in complete humility, with the attitude that she was not worthy to even be in His presence. That was a good way for her to come to Jesus, but He did not want her to *stay* there. He raised her up, acknowledged her love, forgave her sin, and sent her in peace.

Of the works done in this chapter, this was the greatest. Healed sickness (as in the centurion's servant), or restored life (as in the widow's son) are not permanent works of healing, because those bodies would one day die again. Sins that are forgiven are forgiven *forever*.

Lesson Summary

Luke 7:36-50 tells the story of Jesus dining at the house of a Pharisee named Simon. During the meal, a woman known for her sinful life approaches Jesus, bringing an alabaster jar of perfume. She stands behind Jesus, weeping, and begins to wet his feet with her tears. She then wipes them with her hair, kisses them, and pours perfume on them.

Simon, the Pharisee, is surprised and critical of Jesus for allowing this woman to touch him, thinking that if Jesus were truly a prophet, he would know what kind of woman she was. Jesus, knowing Simon's thoughts, tells him a parable about forgiveness, contrasting the woman's actions of love and gratitude with Simon's lack of hospitality.

Jesus then directly addresses the woman, telling her that her sins are forgiven and that her faith has saved her. He acknowledges her act of love and contrasts it with Simon's lack of hospitality, highlighting the importance of forgiveness, love, and faith. Several lessons can be drawn from the story in Luke 7:36-50:

- 1. Forgiveness and Grace:** Jesus shows that forgiveness is available to all, regardless of their past actions. The woman, despite her sinful life, receives forgiveness and grace from Jesus. This teaches us about the limitless nature of God's forgiveness and the importance of extending forgiveness to others.
- 2. True Repentance:** The woman's actions demonstrate true repentance. She shows deep remorse for her sins through her actions, illustrating that genuine repentance involves a change of heart and a turning away from sin.
- 3. Love and Compassion:** The woman's actions also highlight the importance of love and compassion. Her love for Jesus and her desire to express it in a tangible way demonstrate the transformative power of love and the impact it can have on others.
- 4. Judgment and Hypocrisy:** Jesus challenges the judgmental and hypocritical attitude of the Pharisee, Simon. Simon's self-righteousness blinds him to his own need for forgiveness and prevents him from showing love and compassion to others. This teaches us about the danger of hypocrisy and the importance of humility and self-reflection.
- 5. Faith and Salvation:** Jesus commends the woman for her faith, indicating that it played a role in her salvation. This teaches us about the significance of faith in Jesus and the transformative power it has in our lives.

Overall, this passage emphasizes the importance of forgiveness, love, humility, and faith in the Christian life. It challenges us to examine our own attitudes and actions towards others and to strive to emulate the love and compassion shown by Jesus.

This lesson is significant as it demonstrates Jesus' teachings on forgiveness, love, and the inclusion of sinners. It also highlights the contrast between outward appearances and inner righteousness, as the Pharisee, who appeared righteous, lacked love and compassion, while the sinful woman, who appeared unrighteous, demonstrated great love and faith.