

Worship from the Heart

From Luke's gospel we read of a banquet which turned into worship service.

³⁶Now 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, ³⁸and 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 perfume. ³⁹Now when the Pharisee who 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." (Luke 7:36-39).

The setting is a banquet that is interrupted by a woman with questionable morals who makes a scene over the guest of honor, Jesus. And when the host Pharisee observes that Jesus does not rebuke her and send her away, he makes a judgment call that belittles Jesus as prophet of God.

⁴⁰And Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he replied, "Say it, Teacher." ⁴¹"A money lender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴²When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?"

⁴³Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more. And He said to him, "You have judged correctly."

⁴⁴Turning 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.

⁴⁵You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. ⁴⁶You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. ⁴⁷For 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." (Luke 7:40-47).

When Jesus saw the contrast between the woman and Simon the Pharisee He presented the Parable of the Two Debtors. It was a simple parable which made the point that those who are forgiven more, love more. Applied to the situation at hand, it showed that Simon who thought of himself as righteous, had little love for Jesus, and the woman, who knew that she was a sinner who had been forgiven much, showed extreme love for Jesus.

⁴⁸Then He said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven."

⁴⁹Those who were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?"

⁵⁰And He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."
(Luke:7:48-50).

Jesus ends the discussion with a pronouncement of forgiveness and salvation for the woman who had been a great sinner, much to the shock and chagrin of the self-righteous Pharisees. In their minds, since only God could forgive sins, then Jesus was blaspheming to say such things. Either Jesus was the Messiah or a false prophet.

Jesus had been accused of hanging around with sinners.

Mark Twain said,

"Having spent considerable time with good people, I can understand why Jesus like to be with tax-collectors and sinners."

Someone else said, "Old Pharisees never die, you just wish they would."

In this setting Jesus accepted the love and worship of the sinful woman and then justified her for her faith. This is what Jesus does.

I. The People

The story is all about a woman who arrived at a banquet, uninvited.

Invited guests reclined around a low table, leaning on their left arm and side and feeding themselves with their free right hand.

The whole town was there, watching and listening to the conversation, and showing the courtesy of neighbors in silent participation.

Boice writes,

“We know that banquets were public affairs to which many uninvited guests would come. They would not partake of the meal but would be in the room and would stand or sit along the walls. In our culture that would be entirely out of line. But in the east it was an expected and even courteous thing to do. It was a way of honoring the host, acknowledging that he did indeed have an illustrious guest. And it would also be a way to listen in on the conversation. In some ways, the greater the bustle, the greater a success the evening would be.”¹

1. Simon the Pharisee

The Pharisee, who hosted the banquet, wasn't a born again believer. He was interested in spiritual things and was respectful of Jesus as a perceptive and effective teacher. But he was wondering if Jesus was a true prophet,

“Is He from God or is He a charlatan?”

I think he invited Jesus to dinner to get to know him better.

The customs of the day on the part of a host were neglected.

Why he neglected these things was because he was a skeptic.

He wanted to make sure who Jesus was before he offered any courtesy.]

2. Jesus

Jesus came to reach the lost sheep of Israel. He accepted the dinner invitation to Simon because he wanted to reach the hearts of religious and righteous sinners, along with down and out sinners.

“I didn't come to seek the righteous, but sinners.”

Jesus came to “seek and to save those who are lost.”

3. The Woman

Uninvited, unwanted, and well known by all.

She was there because of Jesus – He loved her and would forgive her.

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *The Parables of Jesus*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), p. 170.

His love melted her heart so she stood there and wept for her sin. She showed her love by her tears and perfume.

...she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, ³⁸and 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 perfume.

Swindoll writes,

“Tears of gratitude soaked the Lord’s feet as she sobbed uncontrollably, lost in wonder, love, and praise. Luke used the imperfect tense to describe her continual weeping, wiping, kissing, and anointing, suggesting that she carried on for an uncomfortably long time. Moreover, her actions depict worship so profuse and so unrestrained as to border on self-humiliation. In the ancient Near East, only the lowest slaves touched the feet of another, and almost always for washing. A woman’s hair represented her dignity and, if married, she never took it down in public. So, the woman’s hair touching Jesus’ feet represented the most extreme act of humility possible.”²

She then added the perfume, normally used for anointing the head, she anointed his feet. Jesus allowed the woman to worship Him, perhaps for some time. And while she worshiped the Pharisee condemned.

³⁹Now when the Pharisee who 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.”

His logic consists of a hypothetical “if-then” statement.

Jesus couldn’t be from God because he tolerated the presence of a sinner.
(Example: ‘He can’t be rich because he drives a cheap car.’)

The Pharisee was skilled at putting up a disguise – a false impression, a mask. He maintained “a composed, dignified façade despite his inward disgust.”

² Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll’s New Testament Insights: Luke*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), p. 186.

II. The Parable

Jesus then spoke a parable to Simon.

A money-lender had two people who owed him money.

One owed 500 denarii (day's wages).

The other only 50.

When neither could pay the lender forgave them.

The question and point of the parable: "Which one loved him more?"

Simon answered the question correctly,

"The one who had the bigger debt canceled."

In truth, both debtors could have been tossed into debtor's prison until their families came up with the money to repay their debt.

When Jesus gave forgiveness to the sinful woman He was simply applying the point of the parable and cancelling the debt of the greater sinner.

⁵⁰And He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

There were a lot of people listening to Jesus' teaching.

Through the parable Jesus rebuked the Pharisee's low-class hosting while he praised the despised woman's high-class treatment of Him.

There's a grammatical emphasis: "no water," "no kiss," and "no oil."

As applied the parable He showed that Simon was not a gracious host.

"An especially honored guest typically received the assistance of a servant or someone in the household, who removed His sandals, washed his feet, dried them with a towel, and the applied a small amount of perfume. This was not expected, but upper-class hosts typically displayed this kind of refinement.

A typical Middle Eastern greeting – even today – involved a kiss on both cheeks, the Western equivalent of a handshake or a casual embrace among friends. Furthermore, a special courtesy included anointed the head with a small amount of inexpensive olive oil."³

³ Swindoll, 188.

The contrast between the woman's treatment of Jesus and Simon's is then emphasized by Jesus.

⁴⁴Turning 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.

⁴⁵You gave My no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. ⁴⁶You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume.

Simon's misunderstandings:

1. Simon misunderstood the woman.

He was only looking at the outward appearance, and not her heart.

She had turned from sin to salvation.

From repentance she was now in the act of worshiping Jesus.

Simon only saw her past, and wanted nothing to do with her,

... end of discussion.

2. Simon misunderstood Jesus.

Simon thought that if Jesus were a prophet he would know the character of the woman and would have nothing to do with her. Jesus did know the character of the woman, but he also knew her repentance. Unlike the Pharisees, He did not reject her, instead, He justified her. He came to earth for sinners.

"For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

(Luke 19:10)

3. Simon misunderstood himself.

He looked down on the woman and other sinners. In doing so he failed to see himself as a sinner, also in need of the grace of God.

The Pharisees believed that at the end of their life God would owe them eternal life – being justified by their good works.

Failure to see oneself as a sinner is the root cause of his lack of love.

Seeing ourselves as God sees us will bring deep humility and Christ-like love.

III. The Practice

This woman's worship came from a heart set free.

Thoughts on worship:

1. **Purpose** – we were made for worship.
2. **Love** – Real religion is love – a relationship with God, not simply a set of rules govern behavior and faith.
3. **Forgiveness** – the more we realize that we have been forgiven the more we love. When we are forgiven we worship.

He who is forgiven much, loves much.

Knowing that we are forgiven our many sins not only brings us into grace, but it fills us with love and worship for Jesus.

If we have trouble worshiping, we may need His forgiveness.

...her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much;
but he who is forgiven little, loves little