



THE GOSPEL OF
Luke

SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 7:36-50

To understand how love, faith, and gratitude are connected.

Understanding the Cost

I have several Bibles. Since I became a Christian, I have bought some of them and some of them have been gifted to me. They represent a variety of translations. Some of them are study Bibles with commentary written by a variety of different contributors. Some of them were cheaper and some of them were quite a bit more expensive. I have one, though, that is invaluable to me. It wasn't an expensive Bible nor does it have commentary. In fact, it is one of the most generic Bibles I own. What makes it special is that I used it for the entirety of my seminary experience while earning my Master of Divinity and Master of Theology. I used different colored pens to take tons of notes from different lectures, especially from Bible exposition and language courses. The result is a Bible with notes, thoughts, and Bible references from some of the most bright theological minds alive. It's a special Bible because it is a one-of-a-kind. I have a deeper appreciation for that Bible over and above all of the other Bibles because I recognize the special value of it.

In Luke 7:36-50, we learn that we will have deeper appreciation for God's forgiveness in our lives the more aware we are of how deeply sinful we really are, and the deeper our appreciation for God's forgiveness is, the more robustly we will express our gratitude to God through worship.

Dinner, Party of Three

Verse 36 begins by setting the scene: "One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table." Edwards reminds us that "the banquet table is a favorite Lukan

narrative setting (5:29; 7:36; 9:16; 11:37; 14:1; 22:14; 24:30).¹ This is now the second time we have seen Jesus invited to dinner, the first being at the house of Levi (Matthew) and a bunch of other tax collectors and they are interrupted by Pharisees. Now, a Pharisee has invited Jesus to dinner and they are interrupted by “a sinner” (Lk. 7:37). Below is a breakdown of the two individuals who make an appearance in this dinner scene.

SIMON

The Pharisee is later revealed to be named “Simon” (Lk. 7:40). Beyond his name, we do not know much about him. Pharisees were well educated in the Old Testament and skilled at teaching. That this Pharisee has invited Jesus indicates likely that Jesus was seen by this point as a skilled teacher and prophet as well.

THE WOMAN

Not much is known about the woman either, other than that she was “a woman of the city, who was a sinner” and that she “brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and was standing behind Him at His feet, weeping” and that “she began to wet His feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment” (Lk. 7:37-38). This act of adoration for Jesus draws the ire of the Pharisee, and he questions whether or not Jesus really *is* a prophet on the basis that if He *were* a prophet, He would have known that this woman was a sinner and not let her touch Him.

A Divine Encounter

An important detail in this story is that the Pharisee did not outwardly verbalize his skepticism regarding whether or not Jesus really was a prophet. It says in verse 39 that the Pharisee “said to himself,” indicating he was thinking about what he was seeing, but not actually saying anything about it. This reality makes verse 40 much more striking: “And Jesus answering said to him,” indicates that Jesus knew what the man was thinking. This is not the only time we see Jesus, the Divine Son of God, intuit others’ thoughts. In fact, we have already seen it once before in Luke 5:22.

He also refers to the Pharisee more formally for the first time as “Simon,” which may have been common knowledge, but the fact that Jesus waits to call him by his name until after he reads his mind insinuates that this is a continuation of the Divine mind of Christ knowing all people on a personal level. That Jesus chooses to call him by his name is also telling; Jesus wasn’t interested in his title but rather in who he was as a human being. In order to explain why Jesus allowed the sinful woman to touch Him, Jesus tells Simon a parable.

THE PARABLE

The parable involves a money lender forgiving the debt of two individuals to whom he had lent money. One of the individuals owed a debt of 50 denarii, and the other owed an overwhelming 500 denarii. Given what we know of the denarii during this time, 50 denarii would have equaled roughly two months’ worth of labor, and 500 denarii would have equaled two years’ wages. After explaining that both of these individuals are forgiven their debts, He then poses the question in verse 42: “Which of them will love him (the moneylender) more?” Simon answers correctly: “I suppose, for whom he canceled the larger debt” (Lk. 7:43).

Jesus then makes the connection. He draws a comparison between the sinful woman and Simon, demonstrating how everything she has done for Jesus has been a greater act of love than the Pharisee has done: “You gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her

¹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 226.

hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment” (Lk. 7:44-46).

DIVINE ABSOLUTION

It’s at this point that Jesus unveils that those who love much are forgiven much, and those who love little are forgiven little. It isn’t that Jesus is saying that some people don’t receive full forgiveness and some receive only partial, but rather that the extent to which one is aware of their forgiveness will in large part correlate to how much they love God. The depth of our love for God is connected to depth of our understanding of our own sin. If I am aware of how sinful I really am, I will understand more fully the value and meaning and fullness of God’s forgiveness in my life. It’s at this point that Jesus confirms His deity: “And he said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven’” (Lk. 7:48). Only God can forgive sin (Is. 43:25; Ps. 32:5; 1 Jn. 1:9; Mk. 2:7). Jesus reveals Himself to be much more than a skilled teacher or a prophet, but God in the flesh (Jn. 1:1-5; 14). Even those at the dinner table (like Levi who had his tax collector friends present, it appears the same is true for Simon) questioned Jesus in verse 49: “Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this, who even forgives sins?” Jesus replied to the woman, “Your faith has saved you, go in peace” (Lk. 7:50). It would be tempting to understand her works as that which saved her, but Jesus makes it clear that it was her faith that led to righteous works that saved her. True, realized faith will always result in an outworking of gratitude and worship towards God. Her faith in Jesus led her to weep, anoint His feet, and kiss His feet continually because she knew that He was truly the Messiah and capable of forgiving sin. The Pharisees did not understand any of it because their own self-righteousness clouded their ability to see the Messiah for whom they had so long awaited.

What About Now?

There are two takeaways from this passage. First, the more in touch we become with how broken and sinful we are, the more we will appreciate the grace of God in our lives. The more I realize how prevalent my sinful tendencies are, the more I will grow in gratitude for what Christ has done on my behalf. Second, faith in God should always result in an outworking of the Spirit in our lives. James says clearly: “Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (Ja. 2:17). True faith will always result in new behavior because it is accompanied with repentance.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Luke 7:36. Who asked Jesus to eat with him? Where did Jesus go to eat?

2. Read Luke 7:37-38. Who shows up to the dinner, and what does she do to Jesus?

Day Two

1. Read Luke 7:39. What did the Pharisee think about Jesus as a result of this woman’s behavior?

2. Read Luke 7:40-42. How did Jesus respond to the Pharisee's thoughts? What did He say to him?

Day Three

1. Read Luke 7:43. How did the Pharisee respond? What did Jesus say about his response?

2. Read Luke 7:44-46. Write down the differences in behavior between the woman and the Pharisee.

Day Four

1. Read Luke 7:47-48. What did they reveal about the woman's faith in comparison to the Pharisee's faith? What did Jesus say to the woman in response to her acts of faith?

2. Read Luke 7:49-50. What did the Pharisee's friends think about Jesus forgiving the woman's sins? What did He say to her additionally?

Week 29 Discussion: Look in the Mirror

In this week's study, we learn that the more we are aware of our sin, the more aware we are of God's forgiveness, and the more in touch we are of God's forgiveness, the greater our worship will be. Talk as a group about how in touch you are with your sin, and how it affects your worship life.

1. Icebreaker: On a scale of 1 to 10, how in touch are you with your sin?
2. Have you ever taken a Freedom Group? If so, how did it help you understand your defects?
3. Do you think there are any sinful tendencies you have that you are not really aware of? Why or why not?
4. How has your worship life changed as you have grown in your faith?
5. How often do you think about what God has saved you from?
6. How can the church become a safer place for you to let go of your sin and secrets?

Takeaways:

1. Jesus is invited to dinner by a Pharisee named Simon.
2. A sinful woman anoints and washes Jesus' feet.
3. Jesus teaches that greater love for and faith in God will result in greater acts of worship.