

A Pharisee, a Sinful Woman, and Jesus (Luke 7:36-50)

Luke 7:36-50 presents one of the most compelling, stirring, and humbling descriptions of Jesus' gracious way with people. It involves a self-righteous Pharisee and a woman with a reputation for sin who both encounter Jesus. The woman seeks Jesus to express remorse over her sin and goes away forgiven. The Pharisee questions Jesus' authority and apparently remains unchanged in his self-righteous condition. This encounter presents a powerful contrast between faith and works, between showing grace and being judgmental. In this encounter we discover that those who truly receive Jesus' grace will respond with selfless love.

**When we reflect on our spiritual condition in the presence
of Jesus, we'll experience a deep sense of genuine contrition (7:36-39).**

Two people encountered Jesus in this account, but only one of them expressed remorse coupled with gratitude. The sinful woman acknowledged her spiritual failings and found comfort in Jesus Christ.

Jesus accepted the invitation of a Pharisee to eat together in his home (7:36).

Jesus willingly mingled with common people as well as the elite in Jewish society. His mission, calling people to repentance, crossed all barriers. A certain Pharisee named Simon (verse 40) invited Jesus to his home, and Jesus gladly had dinner with him. As was the custom of that day, they reclined around the table, leaning on one side with feet extended away from the table. The stage was set for a remarkable display of Jesus' grace and forgiveness.

A sinful woman came to see Jesus and, weeping, anointed His feet with ointment (7:37-38).

It wasn't uncommon for people who weren't invited into a home to simply show up, especially to hear a traveling guest or teacher. A woman who lived in the village where Simon was hosting Jesus came to the house. She had a reputation for living a sinful life, most likely a life of sexual immorality. This sinful woman brought an alabaster jar of perfume, anticipating her act of contrition and gratitude. Standing at Jesus' feet and weeping, the woman wet Jesus' feet with her tears and wiped His feet with her hair. She repeatedly kissed (as the Greek tense of the verb indicates) Jesus' feet. Finally, the woman took the jar of perfume and anointed Jesus. This display of remorse revealed a heart that had encountered the grace of Jesus Christ.

The Pharisee thought to himself that Jesus was no prophet since He didn't recognize this woman's sinful condition (7:39).

While the sinful woman anointed Jesus, the Pharisee reflected on the situation, concluding that Jesus could not be a prophet from God. A true prophet would have recognized this woman's sinfulness and, by implication, would have rejected her physical touch and her outpouring of attention. Simon the Pharisee had not encountered Jesus in the way that the sinful woman had. He saw only the sin. Jesus saw the sinner. This sinful woman, having come into the presence of Jesus, had a deep sense of contrition. She put herself at the mercy of Jesus.

When we recognize the extent of Jesus' forgiveness, we'll respond with life altering love (7:40-43).

Jesus was a prophet from God and much, much more. He is God in the flesh. Because Jesus is God, He knew all about the sinful woman's reputation. He also knew she needed divine forgiveness. Jesus also knew that Simon the Pharisee needed to better understand God's grace.

Jesus told the Pharisee a story about a creditor who forgave two debtors, one owing a large sum and the other owing a small sum (7:40-42a).

Jesus addressed Simon's silent question, asking permission to say something significant to Simon. Simon, politely calling Jesus "Teacher," invited Him to speak. Jesus then described two people who were in debt to the same creditor. One owed the creditor the equivalent of five hundred days' salary, while the other owed only fifty days' salary—a mere ten percent of the first debtor. However, both individuals were unable to repay their debts so the creditor freely forgave them. He released them from their debts.

Jesus asked the Pharisee which debtor would love the creditor more (7:42b).

Jesus then asked Simon, "Now which one of them will love him more?" Which individual would be more grateful for the forgiven debt?

The Pharisee reluctantly replied that the one who had been forgiven most would love most (7:43).

Simon answered with a tone of reluctance, probably suspecting where the conversation was headed. He said, "I suppose" that the one forgiven the greater debt would show the greater love. Jesus affirmed Simon's response. Those who are forgiven much will respond with greater love. Their lives will be changed forever.

When we regard Jesus with a nonchalant attitude, we reveal an inner sense of self-righteousness (7:44-47).

While those who receive great forgiveness show great love, those who fail to recognize the depth of their sin and the extent of God's grace will likely fail to enter into God's love. Their self-righteous mindset is evident from their indifferent attitude toward Jesus.

Jesus pointed out the glaring contrast between the way the Pharisee and the sinful woman had treated Him (7:44-46).

The contrast between Simon the Pharisee and the sinful woman couldn't have been more dramatic. Looking at the woman, Jesus pointed out this contrast to His dinner host. He pointed out that Simon hadn't washed Jesus' feet, but the sinful woman had washed His feet with her tears. Jesus pointed out that the Pharisee hadn't greeted Him with a kiss, but the sinful woman had repeatedly kissed His feet. Jesus pointed out that Simon hadn't anointed Jesus' head with oil, but the sinful woman had anointed His feet with perfume.

Jesus concluded that the sinful woman showed greater love because she had experienced great forgiveness (7:47).

Jesus declared to the Pharisee that the sinful woman's many sins had been forgiven. Jesus didn't deny the woman's sinful past, but He readily pronounced forgiveness. Her forgiveness may have been, in part, based on her love for Jesus, but more likely Jesus' statement means that her forgiveness prompted her love for Jesus. She'd been forgiven much, so she loved Jesus greatly. Without saying it directly about Simon, Jesus pointed out that the one who is forgiven little loves little. The lesson was obvious to the Pharisee, his guests, and the sinful woman. Simon's sense of self-righteousness had caused him to show little love for Jesus, little hospitality, little respect. Indifference to Jesus comes from hearts that sense little need for Him. But we need Jesus desperately. Instead of self-righteousness, which fails every time, we need His righteousness, a righteousness that becomes ours only through faith.

When we turn to Jesus in faith, we receive His full and gracious forgiveness (7:48-50).

The sinful woman had responded to Jesus in faith, trusting Him to be merciful, gracious, and forgiving. Jesus didn't disappoint her. He granted her forgiveness.

Jesus said to the sinful woman that her sins had been forgiven (7:48).

Jesus turned to the sinful woman and said, "Your sins are forgiven." These words must have rung sweetly in this woman's heart. Her burden was gone. For the first time in her life she had holiness, hope, and joy.

The Pharisee and his guests wondered out loud who Jesus was, that He should forgive sins (7:49).

Of course, Jesus' declaration of forgiveness ventured into the realm of God's divine prerogatives. Only God can truly forgive sin. The Pharisees' guests, no doubt self-righteous individuals like Simon himself, murmured, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" Did Jesus think He possessed special spiritual authority? Of course, Jesus does possess authority, divine authority. He is God in the flesh. He forgives sins, and He provided the basis for forgiveness by paying for our sins with His death on the cross.

Jesus assured the sinful woman that her faith had saved her and encouraged her to go in peace (7:50).

The scene at the Pharisee's house ends with Jesus' final statement to the sinful woman. He stated that her faith had saved her. Because she recognized her deeply sinful condition and she trusted Jesus, she received forgiveness and received eternal salvation. For this reason Jesus could tell her, "Go in peace." Her heart was now at peace with God. We can't help but wonder if any others at the dinner party that day, including the host, reflected on this event and turned to Jesus for forgiveness and salvation. Our spiritual needs are deep, much deeper than we realize or would like to admit. Only Jesus can grant us forgiveness and eternal salvation, and He does so freely when we turn to Him in faith. Having received these blessings from our Lord, we'll love Him all the more. That love will transform our lives. Those who truly receive Jesus' grace will respond with selfless love.