

# **To Seek and To Save the Lost**

## **A Woman Anoints Jesus' Feet**

*Luke 7:36-50*

**Rev. Freddy Fritz**

January 5, 2014

# A Woman Anoints Jesus' Feet

## Scripture

Dr. Luke wrote a book we call *The Gospel of Luke* in order to show that Jesus is indeed the promised Christ, the one sent by God to seek and to save lost sinners (Luke 19:10).

In Luke 7:36-50 we read about the wonderful response of a lost sinner who has found true forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

Let's read about a woman anointing Jesus' feet in Luke 7:36-50:

**<sup>36</sup>One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. <sup>37</sup>And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, <sup>38</sup>and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, 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. <sup>39</sup>Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." <sup>40</sup>And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher."**

**<sup>41</sup>"A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. <sup>42</sup>When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" <sup>43</sup>Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." <sup>44</sup>Then turning 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. <sup>45</sup>You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet."**

**<sup>46</sup>You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. <sup>47</sup>Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.” <sup>48</sup>And he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” <sup>49</sup>Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this, who even forgives sins?” <sup>50</sup>And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” (Luke 7:36-50)**

## Introduction

During the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD a dreadful plague swept through the city of Alexandria in Egypt. According to Dionysius the Great, it was the Christians who loved and cared for the sick, even at the cost of their own lives. He wrote:

Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy. . . . Many, in nursing and curing others, transferred their death to themselves and died in their stead.<sup>1</sup>

It was the Christians who showed astonishing love during those horrifying days. Dionysius went on to say, “The heathen behaved in the very opposite way. At the first onset of the disease, they pushed the sufferers away and fled from their dearest, throwing them into the roads before they were dead, and treated unburied corpses as dirt, hoping thereby to avoid the spread and contagion of the fatal disease.”<sup>2</sup> Even the famous physician, Dr. Galen, fled the city in fear!

---

<sup>1</sup> Dionysius of Alexandria, quoted in Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1997), 82-83.

<sup>2</sup> Dionysius of Alexandria, quoted in Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 84.

What made the difference? Why did Christians love and care for the sick and dying? The reason is that the Christians loved others because they had been forgiven. A life of astonishing love is the wonderful response of lost sinners who have found true forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

We see this truth beautifully expressed in the incident of a woman anointing Jesus' feet as set forth in Luke 7:36-50.

## Lesson

An analysis of the incident of a woman anointing Jesus' feet in Luke 7:36-50 will show us the wonderful response of a lost sinner who has found true forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

This incident revolves around Jesus' interaction with two main characters:

1. Jesus and the Sinful Woman (7:36-38)
2. Jesus and the Self-Righteous Man (7:39-50)

### I. Jesus and the Sinful Woman (7:36-38)

First, let's look at Jesus and the sinful woman.

Luke said that **one of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and so Jesus went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table** (7:36).

Luke did not say why Simon **the Pharisee** wanted Jesus **to eat with him**. Perhaps he was trying to catch Jesus in some error. Perhaps he was curious to learn more about Jesus. Or perhaps it was his turn to invite the visiting preacher to eat in his home. Whatever the reason, Simon invited Jesus **to eat with him**, and Jesus accepted. Yes, Jesus was willing to eat with anyone . . . even a Pharisee!

Simon did not extend to Jesus the customary hospitality that was given to visitors. Commentator William Barclay says,

When a guest entered a house three things were always done. The host placed his hand on the guest's shoulder and gave him the kiss of peace. That was a mark of respect that was never omitted in the case of a distinguished Rabbi. The roads were only dust tracks, and shoes were merely soles held in place by straps across the foot. So always cool water was poured over the guest's feet to cleanse and comfort them. Either a pinch of sweet-smelling incense was burned or a drop of attar of roses was placed on the guest's head. These things good manners demanded, and in this case not one of them was done.<sup>3</sup>

The houses of well-to-do people in the Ancient Near East were built around central courtyards in which formal meals were served. The host and his guests reclined on low-lying couches that were arranged around the outside of the table and facing away from the table. They would lie on their left sides to eat with their right hands. Their feet would extend away from the table, in keeping with the belief that their feet were unclean. Interestingly, on these occasions the door into the courtyard from the street was left open so that anyone could wander in and listen to the conversation. Typically, a large crowd of people wandered in and stood around the perimeter of the courtyard to see and hear what was going on.<sup>4</sup>

This custom in the Ancient Near East helps us understand the presence of uninvited attendees – including this woman – at Simon the Pharisee's house for this meal.

That is the setting for what takes place next.

Notice the next two words that Luke used in verse 37a, **“And behold.”** One Greek dictionary says that these words are “prompters of attention, which serve also to emphasize the fol-

---

<sup>3</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 112.

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 5, 7.

lowing statement – ‘look, listen, pay attention.’”<sup>5</sup>

Luke then said, **“a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, 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”** (7:37b-38).

I want you to notice a few things about this sinful woman. We don’t know her name. We don’t know who she was. She does not say a single word during this entire incident. The only thing we know about her is that she was **a woman of the city, who was a sinner**. We actually do not know the nature of her sin, although most commentators believe that she was a prostitute. Perhaps she was, but it does not really matter because a sinner is a sinner, regardless of the kind of sin.

Why was the sinful woman at Simon’s house? When **she learned that Jesus was reclining at table in the Pharisee’s house** she immediately **brought an alabaster flask of ointment** to Jesus. Clearly Luke wanted his readers to understand that she came to **the Pharisee’s house** because of Jesus. Why?

Commentator Kent Hughes gives the answer:

She was there because of gratitude. Somewhere, somehow, possibly through a public sermon or maybe through a private, unrecorded conversation, Jesus’ words had gone to her heart, and she had turned to him and so found forgiveness.<sup>6</sup>

This sinful woman knew herself to be a sinner. She had received forgiveness for her sin, and when she learned that Jesus was in the Pharisee’s house she went to him because she

---

<sup>5</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 811.

<sup>6</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 276.

knew that he was a friend of sinners.

While she was **standing** in the courtyard **behind** Jesus **at his feet**, she must have noticed that his feet were still dusty. Perhaps she realized that Simon, who did not offer Jesus the customary hospitality, had slighted him. Or perhaps she was simply thrilled to see Jesus again.

Whatever her thinking, she suddenly burst into tears. These were no sniffles. Her tear dam burst! She could not stop **weeping**, and soon **she began to wet** Jesus' **feet with her tears**. She had no towel to wipe the tears off Jesus' feet. And so she did the next best thing she could. She undid her long hair **and wiped** her tears **with the hair of her head**.

Now that was most unacceptable in the culture of that day. You see, on the day that a woman got married she tied up her hair and was never to be seen in public again with her hair let down. Only her husband was allowed to see her hair let down. In fact, the *Talmud* (which is a collection of opinions of Jewish Law) said that a woman could be divorced for letting down her hair in the presence of another man.<sup>5</sup> So grave was this offense that the rabbis put a woman's loosening her hair and uncovering her breasts in the same category.<sup>6</sup>

At this point the woman no longer cared what other people thought. So she **kissed** Jesus' **feet and anointed them with the ointment**. Her expression of astonishing love was the wonderful response of a lost sinner who had found true forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

For years she had been living in shame and guilt. She desperately wanted a new life, but the religious leaders told her she needed to be righteous if she wanted forgiveness. She knew that she was not righteous; she was a sinner! Then one day she encountered Jesus and he told her that she simply

---

<sup>5</sup> Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1955), 101–102. (See *Tos. Sota* 5, 9; *j. Gitt.* 9, 50d.)

<sup>6</sup> Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes*, 9.

needed to ask God for forgiveness and he would give it to her. So, she did! She was forgiven! And her entire world was changed! She was a new creature in Christ.

Many of us remember that day when Jesus forgave us our sins. We sang with the hymn writer:

My sin – O the bliss of this glorious thought!  
My sin, not in part, but the whole,  
Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more;  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!<sup>7</sup>

Have you received this forgiveness? It is available to you today. Simply ask Jesus to forgive you for your sins – whatever they may be – and he will do so.

## II. Jesus and the Self-Righteous Man (7:39-50)

And second, let's look at Jesus and the self-righteous man.

Luke shifted the focus from the sinful woman to Simon, Jesus' host. Luke noted that **when the Pharisee who had invited Jesus saw what the woman had done, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner"** (7:39).

Simon's thoughts were utterly judgmental. He knew that the woman was **a sinner**. (I wonder how he knew that she was a sinner, but I shall leave that speculation for others to consider!) However, he believed himself to be righteous. Pharisees were the "separated ones."<sup>8</sup> That is, they separated themselves from those whom they perceived to be sinners so as not to be-

---

<sup>7</sup> Paul Eckert, *Steve Green's MIDI Hymnal: A Complete Toolkit for Personal Devotions and Corporate Worship.*, Electronic ed. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 75.



come contaminated.

Just how utterly judgmental Simon's thoughts were is revealed by the word he used for the woman **"touching"** Jesus. Bible scholar Kenneth Bailey says:

... the word "to touch" in biblical language is used on occasion for sexual intercourse (Genesis 20:6; Proverbs 6:29; 1 Corinthians 7:1). Obviously this is not intended here, but Simon's use of this word in this context has clear sexual overtones. He is affirming that in his opinion it is all very improper and Jesus (if he were a prophet) would know who she was and would (of course) refuse this attention from such a woman.<sup>9</sup>

Simon wanted Jesus to be like him. He wanted Jesus to have nothing to do with this sinful woman. He wanted Jesus to push the woman back into her sin and misery.

But Jesus would have nothing of the sort. He knew precisely what was going on in the woman's grateful heart, and he knew what was going on in Simon's hardened heart.

**And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher" (7:40).**

Then Jesus told Simon a parable. He said, **"A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty" (7:41).**

The **two debtors** in this parable are two sinners. A denarius is "a Roman silver coin equivalent to a day's wage of a common laborer."<sup>10</sup> So it would take fifty days for one to pay off the debt, and it would take five hundred days for the other to pay off the debt. What Jesus was saying is that the woman was a "500-sinner" and Simon was a "50-sinner." Outwardly,

---

<sup>9</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 278.

<sup>10</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 61.

she was ten times as sinful as Simon.

The real problem was that even though Simon perceived the 500-sinner to be a real, serious, terrible sinner, in fact, the 50-sinner was still a sinner too. Both debtors were sinners. Yes, one had ten times more sin, but they were both equally guilty before God. Simon was just as guilty as the sinful woman.

Simon the Pharisee represents so many people, most of whom are religious like Simon, who believe that God accepts them because of their self-righteousness. They believe that God will accept them because they are basically good. Or they believe that God will accept them because they are not as bad as others. They are utterly judgmental of others, and base their eternal destiny on their own self-righteousness.

The great supporter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century ministry of George Whitefield, the Countess of Huntingdon, once invited a high ranking, upper class duchess to hear Whitefield preach and received this amazing written reply:

It is monstrous to be told, that you have a heart as sinful as the common wretches that crawl on the earth. This is highly offensive and insulting; and I cannot but wonder that your Ladyship should relish any sentiments so much at variance with high rank and good breeding.<sup>11</sup>

Continuing with the parable, Jesus said, **“When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both”** (7:42a). Jesus’ point is that both the sinful woman and the self-righteous man were spiritual debtors (that is, sinners), and that both were equally insolvent.

Suppose you lost your job due to a health condition that meant that you are unable to work. You have no income and you owe \$50,000 on your home. And the person sitting next to

---

<sup>11</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 279.

you also lost a job due to health. That person owes \$500,000 on a home. Neither of you have any ability to pay what you owe. You are both equally insolvent.

Let's say, for the sake of illustration, that your banker (for some amazingly merciful reason) came to each of you and paid off your entire mortgage. Your debt is cancelled and you are free from any obligation to the law.

Now listen to Jesus' question to Simon, "**Now which of them will love him more?**" (7:42b). The answer is self-evident, isn't it?

That is why **Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt."** And Jesus said to him, "**You have judged rightly**" (7:43).

Those who have been forgiven the most love the most! Often those who are most conscious of their forgiveness love God the best.

Consider the story of John Newton, the author of the beloved hymn, "Amazing Grace." Newton's mother died when he was not quite seven years of age. When his father remarried and after several brief years of formal education away from home, John left school and joined his father's ship, at the age of eleven, to begin life as a seaman. His early years were one continuous round of rebellion and debauchery. After serving on several ships as well as working for a period of time on the islands and mainland of the West African coast collecting slaves for sale to visiting traders, Newton eventually became a captain of his own slave ship. Needless to say, the capturing, selling and transporting of black slaves to the plantations in the West Indies and America was a cruel and vicious way of life.

On March 10, 1748, while returning to England from Africa during a particularly stormy voyage when it appeared that all would be lost, Newton began reading Thomas a Kempis's book, *Imitation of Christ*. The message of the book and the frightening experience at sea were used by the Holy Spirit to

sow the seeds of Newton's eventual conversion to Christ.

Until the time of his death at the age of eighty-two, John Newton never ceased to marvel at God's forgiveness, mercy and grace that had so dramatically changed his life. This was the dominant theme of his preaching and writing.

On one occasion before his death Newton is quoted as proclaiming with a loud voice during a message, "My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: 'That I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great Savior!'"

John Newton loved much because he knew how great the debt of his sin had been cancelled.

Shortly before his death a spokesman for the church suggested that he consider retirement because of failing health, eyesight and memory. Newton replied, "What, shall the old Africa blasphemer stop while he can still speak?"<sup>12</sup>

Luke said Jesus turned **toward the woman** and **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. 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. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little"** (7:44-47).

Verse 47 seems to suggest that love was the cause of the woman's forgiveness. In fact, the Roman Catholic Church uses this text to argue that justification is not by faith alone, but by love combined with faith.<sup>13</sup> But that is not what is being said. The Greek perfect tense for **"are forgiven"** indicates that Jesus was talking about something that had already happened. The

---

<sup>12</sup> Kenneth W. Osbeck, *101 Hymn Stories* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1982), 28-31.

<sup>13</sup> See Robert A. Sungenis, *Not By Faith Alone: The Biblical Evidence for the Catholic Doctrine of Justification* (Santa Barbara, CA: Queenship, 1996), 203-206.

*International Standard Version* offers a helpful translation of verse 47a: "So I'm telling you that her sins, as many as they are, have been forgiven, and that's why she has shown such great love."<sup>14</sup>

Then Jesus said to the woman, **"Your sins are forgiven"** (7:48). Jesus said this to her to reassure her of her forgiveness.

**Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?"** (7:49). Luke had written earlier in Luke 5:17-26 about Jesus healing a paralyzed man. And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, ". . . . Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (5:21). And, of course, the answer is that Jesus is God. That is why he is able to forgive sins.

**And then Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace"** (7:50).

### Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the incident of a woman anointing Jesus' feet in Luke 7:36-50, we should live lives of astonishing love as the wonderful response of lost sinners who have found true forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

Have your sins been forgiven through faith in Jesus Christ? If so, how are you demonstrating that forgiveness?

Begin by confessing your sin daily. Don't become self-righteous. Be sensitive to all sin in your life. And confess it.

Then express your love to Jesus by telling him about it. You can do so in prayer. You can do so in song. You can do so in worship. And you can do so by telling others who also need to find true forgiveness in Jesus Christ. Amen.

---

<sup>14</sup> *International Standard Version* (Yorba Linda, CA: ISV Foundation, 2011), Luke 7:47.



# **Mission Statement**

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## **Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz**

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons)
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp)
3. [www.sermonaudio.com/source\\_detail.asp?sourceid=FredFritz](http://www.sermonaudio.com/source_detail.asp?sourceid=FredFritz)

## **Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)**

*Answers for Life!*

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: [Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org](mailto:Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org)

Web site: [www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org](http://www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org)

**PRAYER:**

O God, forgive us when we act like the self-righteous Pharisee. Forgive us when we are utterly judgmental of others. Forgive us when we think that we are better than others.

Our Father, thank you for the forgiveness that is available to each of us through faith in Jesus Christ. Thank you for your forgiving us of our many sins.

Enable us to live lives of astonishing love as the wonderful response of lost sinners who have found true forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

And for this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

**BENEDICTION:**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!