

## A Heart Overflowing in Thankfulness (Luke 7:36-50)

### 1. The Invitation (v.36)

- Jesus, supposedly still in Nain, is invited by a Pharisee named Simon (v.40).
- While Luke does not explicitly inform us why Jesus was invited...
  - It may have been because of His growing popularity as a prophet and teacher. This Pharisee is “curious.”
  - Jesus may have preached in Nain as He did at Capernaum (4:31-33) on the Sabbath. Just as in Capernaum, Jesus was invited to a house. In this case, it is the house of a Pharisee (Simon’s; v.39).
  - There were also “small groups” called *haberim* who held meals for religious studies.
- Regardless of the events precipitating the invitation, Jesus chose to eat with him at his house. The banquet table is a favorite Lukan narrative setting (5:29; 7:36; 11:37; 14:1; 22:14; 24:30).
- Luke’s first banquet portrayed a sinner as their host and a Pharisee as an intruder (5:29); in this his second banquet, a Pharisee is the host, and a sinner the intruder.
- Homes had an open floor plan, and Pharisees were often wealthy. They would host guests in a courtyard (more like a block party).
- Reclining at the table is the posture at banquets. The Jews at this time borrowed the practice from the Gentile world by lying on couches in a V pattern around the food as they partook in the meal. This meal is presumably in honor of Jesus, Who was the respected Rabbi and “supposed” prophet (v.39).
- The doors were left open so that the uninvited could enter in and listen to the conversation. They were required to stand against the outside perimeter (wall) and not engage anyone at the table. While they could talk (quietly) amongst themselves, the table was “off limits.”

### 2. The Visitation (v.37-38)

- Luke directs the readers from the table to the uninvited guest. “Behold!”
- A “woman of the city” heard that Jesus was at this Pharisee’s house (Simon). This woman is a notorious sinner. Luke (v.37), the Pharisee (v.39), and Jesus Himself (v.47) all acknowledge that she is a sinner.
  - As a “woman of the city,” some assume that she is a “streetwalker.” Commentators have branded her with a “scarlet letter.”
- Regardless of her “kind” of sin, she was “known” to be a notorious sinner (v.37, 39).
- Her actions are culturally absurd and uncouth, as this notorious sinner not only walks into a Pharisee’s house but also violates all cultural norms by leaving the outside perimeter, asserting herself within vicinity of the table, where only the guests were permitted to be.
- This unnamed woman brought an alabaster flask of ointment (perfume). The Greek for perfume (ointment) indicates it was expensive.
  - There are no parallel accounts of this scene. Some have said the woman was Mary Magdalene, but there is no indication. Others say it was the woman from Bethany, but Jesus is not in Bethany, and that event occurred toward the end of Jesus’ ministry. Additionally, in this account, Simon is not a leper (Matt. 26:6-13; Mk. 14:3-9; Jn. 12:1-8).
- She took her flask of ointment (alabaster), and she was weeping before she could pour it on Jesus’ feet.
  - Those at the table “reclined” as they ate. They leaned on their left arm and ate with their right hand as their feet faced away from the table. This woman has access to His feet, which would be farthest from the table.

- She wets Jesus’ feet with her tears (they are still filthy), wipes them with her hair, kisses His feet, and anoints them. The Greek is imperfect, which indicates repetitive action.
  - The “letting” down of hair, kissing of feet, and a jar of perfume is not necessarily a sign that she was a “prostitute,” as Luke never pairs “sinners and prostitutes” in his gospel. Most of the time, it is with tax collectors (5:30; 7:34; 15:1).
  - Whatever her previous lifestyle was, she was known to be a great sinner.
- Why is she crying? She is overflowing with gratitude because her sins are forgiven.
- Her presence there indicates that she had some previous interaction with Jesus.

### 3. The Reaction (v.39-49)

- A. From Simon, the Pharisee to the “sinful” woman (v.39):
- Her actions surface the prejudices of Simon (the Pharisee). Simon now doubts that Jesus is a prophet because this woman is unclean as a great sinner. While he never verbalizes his thoughts, Jesus again demonstrates His omniscience (5:21-22).
- B. From Jesus to Simon, the Pharisee (v.40-47):
- Jesus tells Simon a parable about two debtors. One owed 500 denarii (500 days of labor), while the other owed 50 denarii (50 days). The creditor forgave both!
    - Jesus asks Simon, “Which will love him more?” Simon answered correctly: “The one who was forgiven most.”
  - Not only does the unnamed woman violate cultural protocols, but so do Jesus (and Simon). The reader is informed of Simon’s dereliction of duty. Jesus looks at the woman (v.44) while talking to Simon:
    - First-century Palestinian meals were volatile. There was a litany of complex and obligatory protocols to follow.
    - The slaves or servants would formally invite the guests, cook the meal, serve it, and wash the feet of the guests.
    - At the arrival of the guests, it was typical for the host to kiss them on the cheek (men included) and anoint distinguished guests with oil (on the head).
  - Jesus is sitting at the table with dirty feet without having been received by Simon.
  - The reader learns that Simon, in some capacity, has as much disdain for Jesus as he does for this woman. Her actions are a silent rebuke to him, as she is the real host.
- C. From those at the table (v.49): the other distinguished guests have watched this scene unfold and are curious about Jesus’ pronouncement of her sins being forgiven. Jesus again demonstrates His authority to free the captives (Isa. 61:1-2; Lk. 4:18-19).

### 4. The Benediction (v.48-50)

- Her sins have been many and are forgiven. The “for” almost seems to suggest that her love was the cause of the forgiveness. The parable’s point demonstrates that she was first forgiven and then loved Jesus for that forgiveness.
- God, to Whom we are indebted, does not forgive us because we love Him: instead, He forgives us, and our response is one of love. The greater awareness of the debt forgiven, the greater the love. Jesus’ pronouncement of forgiveness demonstrates His authority and reassures her.
- There is tremendous irony as Jesus is accused of eating and drinking with sinners (7:30, 34-36). Will Simon see himself as one?

#### Points of Application: