

Jesus had come to seek and save the lost, including the outcasts and the rejected in society. Because of this, the Pharisees accused Him of being a drunkard and glutton, a friend of sinners (Matt. 11:19; Lk. 7:34). But Jesus had come to save all who were lost, including the self-righteous Pharisees. On a number of occasions, in the Book of Luke, Jesus dined with Pharisees (Lk. 7:36ff; 11:37 and 14:1). On this occasion, He demonstrates His power to forgive sin by using the very person that the Pharisee despised the most.

This story in Luke should not be confused with the story found in Matthew, Mark, and John (Matt. 26:6–13; Mk. 14:3–9; Jn.12:1–8). Both stories are about a woman who anointed Jesus with perfume as He reclined at a table in the house of someone named Simon. Although there are remarkable similarities between the two incidents, the dissimilarities are too great for them to be considered the same event.

1. First, it is not unusual for two people to have the name “Simon”, for Simon was an extremely popular name. There are nine different Simons in the NT (Bock, 690). There was Simon Peter and Simon the Zealot (both apostles), Simon the father of Judas, Simon of Cyrene, Simon the tanner, Simon the leper, and others.
2. *The location is different.* The story in Luke happens in Galilee. The story in the other three gospels takes place in Bethany of Judea (Matt. 26:6).
3. *The host is different.* In Luke the host is a Pharisee; the host in the other account is a leper.
4. In Luke, the perfume is poured out on Jesus’ feet; in Matthew and Mark it is poured on Jesus’ head.
5. *The stories take place at different times.* The story in the other three gospels occurs during the last week before Jesus’ crucifixion. The story in Luke happens earlier.
6. *The purposes are different.* In Luke, the story illustrates the great love that flows from one who has been forgiven much; the anointing in the other incident is said to be preparation for Jesus’ burial (Matt. 26:12; Jn. 12:7; Mk. 14:8).
7. *The identity of the women differs.* In Luke the woman is an unnamed “sinner”; in John it is the righteous Mary, the sister of Lazarus.
8. *The reaction to the event differs.* In the other gospels the disciples were indignant over the waste. In Luke the people respond by wondering how Jesus can forgive sin. The disciples aren’t mentioned at all.

7:36 Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him, and He entered the Pharisee’s house and reclined at the table.

It was the custom of the Jews to eat while reclining, not sitting. Normally, they had couches without arms or backs around a table that people would lie upon. Their heads were near the table and they leaned on their left arm with their feet stretched out, angling away from it. The sandals were removed before reclining. The woman was therefore able to approach Jesus’ feet without difficulty.

It was common to invite a visiting rabbi for a meal at one’s home to honor them or to discuss theological, societal, or cultural issues. At such times, the doors of the house were left open so the townspeople could come in as well (Bock, 694; Morris, 161). Although they did not eat with the host and

his guest, they were permitted to stand around the perimeter of the room and unobtrusively listen to the conversation.

7:37 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, 7:38 and 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 the perfume.

"Behold" in verse 37 indicates that something startling or shocking is taking place. It wasn't shocking for a stranger to come in, but it was shocking that "a woman of the city, who was a sinner" would enter the house of a Pharisee. She surely was not welcome and defiled his home.

"Sinner," in the gospel of Luke, is a term used to designate an unregenerate person. But it is also a word that has some disdain in it. James uses it like this when he writes, "Cleanse your hands, you sinners" (Ja. 4:8). In this context, the word "sinner" describes how the woman was seen by others; she was someone who was marked by her sinfulness. The woman may have been a prostitute or immoral, or someone guilty of numerous other public sins.

Verse 37 says that the woman "learned" that Jesus was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house. That is, word had spread around town that Jesus was there and she knew that others would be gathered to listen in on the conversation at the table. Therefore, she got an alabaster vial of perfume and went to the house ("ointment" [NAS] is not a good translation for it implies that it was a thickened substance; this was a liquid).

Flasks for perfume have been found in great numbers by archeologists and were very common. Jewish women often wore a flask of perfume around their necks. The flasks, made of the soft stone, alabaster, preserved the perfume's quality.

For the sake of imagination, we might envision the woman quietly entering the room as Jesus and those at the table were talking. Others may not have paid much attention to her coming in, for the room was already crowded and they were engrossed in the conversation. Women also covered their heads, which would somewhat mask her identity. She worked her way around to Jesus as He was reclining at the table and stood by His feet. Perhaps she was intending to anoint His head with the perfume, but she suddenly became overwhelmed with emotion and began to cry uncontrollably. The intensity of her emotion is brought out by the word Luke uses to describe her weeping; "to wet" (as in, "she began to wet His feet with her tears") is literally "to rain." She is flooded with the reality of the kind of woman that she is and the tears fell from her face like raindrops and landed on Jesus' feet.

She didn't have a towel to wipe the tears off so she let down her hair and began to wipe them with it. This was shameful; Jewish women did not unbind their hair in public. Some of the rabbis even considered this grounds for divorce. It is very apparent that this woman was manifesting a kind of non-

self-conscious, shameless emotion and affection. She was acting spontaneously without concern for what others were thinking. In her eyes, Jesus was the only one in the room.

Then she began to kiss Jesus' feet. There are other recorded instances of people kissing a Rabbi's feet but it is rare and is an extreme act of humility. The word for kiss is the intensive form of the verb, also used in Luke 15:20 of the father kissing his prodigal son who returned home (Bock, 697). The word included the idea of a clinging embrace, not just kisses. It was a deep form of affection. She then began to anoint His feet with the perfume.

The woman's actions could have become a problem for Jesus. She was known as a sinner. She had shamefully taken down her hair. She was touching a man who wasn't her husband, and doing so in public. She then she started pouring perfume upon His feet. Luke uses imperfect tense verbs for wiping, kissing, and anointing, indicating the continuous nature of her actions. The impression is that each step took some time (Bock, 697). This could be a very serious breach of propriety.

The meal with Jesus was far from typical.

7:39 Now when the Pharisee who had 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."

Verse 39 reveals Simon's thoughts on the matter, not his words; he said nothing. The Greek grammar indicates that Simon concluded that Jesus was ignorant of what was going on by this sinful woman, thereby, revealing that He could not be a prophet. In addition, he thought that no sensible religious teacher, let alone a prophet from God, would ever allow a woman like this to touch Him. "Touching" is a present tense verb indicating a prolonged contact with Jesus; this was extremely offensive to the Pharisee.

Simon was disgusted by what was happening. "He was disgusted by what the woman did. He was disgusted by what Jesus let her do. But it was a satisfied disgust because it vindicated in his mind that Jesus was no prophet or He would have had some divine insight into who or what this woman was and never allowed her to defile or touch Him" (MacArthur, Sermon).

Without saying a word, Simon concluded that Jesus could not be from God.

7:40 And Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he replied, "Say it, Teacher."

Although Simon had not asked a question, Jesus answered his thoughts. This is irony at its finest. Simon concluded that Jesus was not a prophet because He didn't know, but as it turns out Jesus not only knew who the woman was, He even knew what Simon was thinking about Him!

Jesus gives Simon a story to think about.

**7:41 "A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.
7:42 "When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?"**

The story is very simple. Two people borrowed money; one had borrowed 500 denarii (500 days' wages), the other fifty. Neither could repay their debt so the moneylender *graciously* forgave them both. The reason forgiveness of debt is always *gracious* is because for debt to be forgiven, the lender must absorb the debt himself. In other words, when debt is forgiven, it doesn't go away. It still has to be paid, but the forgiver incurs it and pays it. The lender suffers loss to set the debtor free. Paul wrote to Philemon about his slave Onesimus and said, "If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account" (Philemon 1:18). Paul was willing to suffer personal loss for what Onesimus owed.

Jesus then asked who would be more grateful and love the moneylender more, the one who had the larger debt forgiven or the one who had the smaller debt forgiven?

7:43 Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have judged correctly."

The answer is obvious. Simon responds cautiously, "I *suppose* the one whom he forgave more." He may have wondered if this was a trap; however, unlike others in similar circumstances who refused to answer Jesus (Lk. 6:9-10), to his credit, he at least replied. Jesus said he answered correctly.

This verse is very important to Jesus' argument. He has just established the principle that great love comes from great forgiveness. But what is important to see is that it wasn't Jesus' opinion alone. The answer came from the very lips of Simon. Simon said it. *He* established the truth that the one forgiven more, loves more. This will also explain why Jesus responded to the woman as He did.

With Simon's admission, Jesus is ready to move on.

**7:44 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.
7:45 "You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet.
7:46 "You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume.
7:47 "For 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."**

Jesus turns Simon's attention back to the woman and applies the parable to the current situation. Simon had just said that the one forgiven much loves much. So Jesus tells Simon, "Do you see this woman?"

The woman, the despised sinner whom Simon abhorred, becomes the example of the greater love Simon had just affirmed.

Simon had neglected to show Christ the honor and normal hospitality so common in that culture. He hadn't washed Jesus' feet when He entered his house; he hadn't anointed Jesus' head with oil; he hadn't welcomed Jesus with a kiss of greeting. On the other hand, the woman did all of these things to an even greater extent than what was expected. She didn't just wash Jesus' feet, she did so with her own tears; she didn't simply use olive oil to anoint Him, she used expensive ointment; she didn't just give Jesus a kiss of greeting, she embraced His feet with deep affection. Why? It is because she had been forgiven much. She loved much because of the greatness of the debt forgiven her.

7:48 Then He said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven."

In both verse 47 and verse 48, "have been forgiven" is in the perfect tense in Greek. The perfect tense indicates a past, completed action with results that continue. It is fair to assume that the woman had already been forgiven by Jesus before this meeting. Perhaps she had met Him the day before or at some other time. She had now come to Jesus to thank Him.

She was that 500 denarii debtor who couldn't pay her debt, who came to Christ, was convicted of her sin, repented, believed, and had been graced with forgiveness and eternal life. The shame was erased. The guilt was removed. The grace of God in Christ had changed her life and she was swept away with gratitude, affection, and love for the One who had forgiven her.

Jesus had responded to her as He did because He knew that she was expressing gratitude for her many sins that were forgiven.

Simon could not fathom the woman's unrestrained love and thankfulness for he had no sense of his own indebtedness to God. He was self-righteous, a man who in his own eyes followed the law and had merited God's favor. The woman showed Simon the proper response one should have when forgiven.

Thus, each part of the parable has a parallel. The moneylender depicts God; the debt signifies sin; the two debtors represent sinners. Forgiveness of the debt portrays the forgiveness of sin. The person who is forgiven little is the Pharisee (the self-righteous); the person who is forgiven much is the woman (the sinner). The one forgiven much loves much; the one who isn't, loves little. Of course, in reality all are in need of much forgiveness, but not all perceive it.

To understand the nature of debt gives insight into the forgiveness of God. Just as anyone who forgives debt incurs the debt themselves, so God when He forgave sin incurred our debt. The debt of sin didn't just go away when it was forgiven; it was transferred to the Forgiver. God personally suffered loss and paid for our sin through the death of His Beloved Son.

7:49 Those who were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?"

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

The reaction to Jesus' announcement that the woman is forgiven introduces another element into the story. It raises the question of Jesus' identity. "Who is this man who even forgives sin?" Simon was pondering if Jesus was a prophet; Jesus' claim to forgive sin moves Him way beyond that. The question probably means the same thing as the comment in Luke 5:21. There the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, "Who is this man who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?" But it is hard to know for sure.

Jesus' response, "your faith has saved you" (verse 50) is directed toward the woman but also challenges everyone who was present. It clarifies that it was not love that saved the woman; it was her faith that saved and produced her love. The others had not only failed to see the woman as a sinner *who could be forgiven*; they had also failed to see the need of forgiveness themselves.

Thus Jesus used that woman as clear testimony to His power to transform a life, and as a witness to the Pharisee of the transforming power of His truth. Her salvation was evident, not by something she said, as she didn't say anything, but by her love for her Savior, so profuse and so passionate. Through the whole story the woman had demonstrated her faith and the forgiveness she had received through her thankfulness and love for Christ. It is one's overwhelming love for Christ that is the single greatest proof of the power of the gospel.