

Jesus Anointed by a Woman Who Led a Sinful Life

Luke 7: 36-50

DIG: What risk was this woman taking in coming to the house of a Pharisee? What does that tell you about her emotional state? What is your impression of **Simon**? What do you think was Yeshua's purpose in telling the parable in verses 41-43? Why didn't He just accuse **Simon** of not loving enough? What does this tell you about Jesus? What does He see in this woman that **Simon** does not? How does this affect Messiah's actions toward her? In this passage, what seems to be Jesus' main concern? **Simon's** concern?

REFLECT: How difficult is it for you to be demonstrative in a relationship with Christ? What hinders you from being more open with your love? When it comes to relationships, are you a "big forgiver" or a "stingy one?" Why? How does this tie in with your relationship with God? What did you learn from this story that you can apply this week? Do you, like Jesus, have friends who are sinners? Why? Why not?

The Gospels are full of stories that contrast the rich and the poor, the proud and the humble. In Yeshua's encounter with the sinful woman, the contrast is between her and a Pharisee whose prejudices blinded him to Christ's love. The exact location is not revealed.

Somewhere in Galilee on His second missionary campaign, one of the Pharisees named **Simon** invited Jesus to have dinner with him (Luke 7:36a). This **Simon** should not be confused with the cured leper in Bethany who would entertain Yeshua a few days before His crucifixion (see Kb - **Jesus Anointed at Bethany**). Neither should the sinful woman be confused with Mary Magdalene. There is absolutely no reason to make that connection. Indeed, if we take the Bible at face value, we have every reason to think otherwise.

Since **Luke** first introduces Mary Magdalene by name in a completely different context in **Luke 8:1-3**, and only two verses after he ended his narrative about the anointing of Jesus' feet, it seems highly unlikely that Mary Magdalene could be the same woman whom **Luke** described but did not name in the preceding account. **Luke** was too careful a historian to neglect such an important detail such as that.⁶³⁸

Although the Pharisees had begun looking for ways to accuse Jesus of breaking the Oral Law (see Ei - **the Oral Law**), their antagonism against Him had not developed into full hatred at that time. **Simon** seems to have been characteristically proud, a truly exclusive Pharisee (see Co - **Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralyzed Man**), and his invitation was not a friendly one. This can be seen by the fact that **Simon** coldly omitted all the gestures offered to a guest deserving high respect and regard.

So the Lord went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table (Luke 7:36b), according to the custom long ago brought over from Persia in the days of the Babylonian Captivity. At the time of Christ, the custom reclining at the table was universally prevalent among the Jews.⁶³⁹ Simon didn't respect Jesus and did not treat Him as one would expect in their culture. Though Jesus had walked the four dusty miles from Capernaum to Magdala in His sandals, Simon had not provided Him with water to wash the dust off of His feet, as per the custom. Simon did not offer the King of kings a respectful kiss of greeting on the cheek or anoint Him with olive oil upon His arrival.

A woman in that town who lived a sinful life, wearing her hair unbound (a sign of her sinful profession), learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house (Luke 7:37a). A sinner was a term that the Pharisees used to refer to prostitutes, thieves and others of low reputation whose sins were blatant and obvious, not the kind a Pharisee wanted to be associated with.⁶⁴⁰ Normally a woman like this would not have such easy access to the house of a Pharisee. This prostitute, however, was a gloomy, miserable, tortured soul. With so many demons afflicting her, she might well have been so demented as to be regarded by most people as an unrecoverable lunatic.⁶⁴¹ The Pharisees would have viewed her as a sinner because of her demon possession. They would have come to the conclusion that the reason for her spiritual state was because she was a prostitute.

Undoubtedly she had heard of the Prophet from Galilee who was reported to be a friend of tax collectors and sinners. She may well have heard Him preach the Good News in the streets proclaiming: Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened . . . take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I AM gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your soul (Matthew 11:28-29). She believed it all. The gates to the kingdom of Heaven had been opened to her by faith and she was saved (see Bw - What God Does for Us at the Moment of Faith). As she hesitated outside Simon's residence she was at war with her own conscience. The demons of her sinful past tried to prevent her from taking one more step toward the Lord of Life. But she resolved to brave the ridicule and go to Him anyway.

How did she gain access? Had she mingled with the servants? Did she sneak past some guards? It didn't matter. She was bound and determined to get to the Master. But what would she do when she got to Him? It was strictly forbidden for any Jewish man to have any conversation with a woman, no matter how lofty her character. So she must have recognized the absolute inappropriateness on her part seeking access to the Galilean Rabbi, whom so many regarded as the God-sent Prophet. But, she had to show her gratitude for the salvation of her soul. She had watched, and followed Him afar off to the Pharisee's house.⁶⁴²

So she entered the room silently and came to Jesus with an alabaster jar of perfume (Luke 7:37b). Where she got the money we can only surmise. But a woman would save for years to buy an alabaster jar for her wedding. The "table" where they ate at was low to the ground. Jesus and the other Pharisees dined in a reclining position to the left, with the left elbow placed in the table, with the head resting on the left open palm. There was sufficient room between them so that each had enough room for the free movements of the right hand. In contrast to the Egyptian Passover (see my commentary on Exodus Bv - The Egyptian Passover), where they ate in haste, **the rabbis taught that because it is the manner of slaves to eat standing, therefore, now we eat sitting and leaning, in order to show that we have been delivered from bondage to freedom.**⁶⁴³ Consequently, she stood behind, meaning at the feet of Yeshua because her social status as a prostitute was likened to that of a slave.

Overcome with emotion, she stood at His feet weeping. She didn't care who was there or what they thought. Hers was an audience of One. Then she knelt at His feet and began to wet them with her tears. Her tears flow freely and without shame. Her face pressed close to Jesus' feet, which were still coated with dust from the road. Then she wiped His feet with her hair, kissed them as a sign of love and respect as she poured perfume on them (Luke 7:38). A flask with this perfume was worn by women around the neck, and hung down below the breast. The smell was enchanting and powerful, filling the room with its flowery sweetness.⁶⁴⁴ She did not speak, and her silence seemed most fitting. Yeshua made no attempt to stop her.

When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this and thought to himself, "If this man were a prophet, let alone the Messiah, He would know who is touching Him and what kind of woman she is - that she is a sinner" (Luke 7:39). But there is never enough proof for unbelief. Indeed, if He had been a mere rabbi or prophet, He probably would have stopped her. But He was more than that, He was the Savior of sinners.

Jesus answered him with the parable of the two debtors. Jesus said: **Simon, I have something to tell you.** "Tell me, teacher," the Pharisee replied smoothly. Then Jesus told a story that contrasted the way the woman treated Him and the way Simon treated Him. **Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?** Since there is no specific word for *to show gratitude* or *to thank* in Hebrew or Aramaic, such words as *love, praise, bless and glorify* were used to express thanks or gratitude.⁶⁴⁵ Simon replied with the one main point of the parable, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven" (Luke 7:40-43). **You have judged correctly,** Jesus said.

Then, for the first time, He turned toward the woman and said to Simon: **Do you see this woman? I came into Your house. You did not give Me any water for My feet, but she wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give Me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing My feet. You did not put oil on My head, but she has poured perfume on My feet (Luke 7:44-46).** Jesus said that **Simon** failed to give **Him** three common courtesies that a host normally gave a guest when invited into the home. First, **Simon did not** provide **any water for Jesus** to wash His dusty **feet** with. Secondly, he failed to give **Yeshua** the **kiss** of greeting that was customary in the Middle East. Thirdly, **Simon did not** give **Him** any **oil to put on His head**. In contrast, **she** recognized **her** debt. **She** washed **Jesus' feet** with **her** tears, not ordinary water. **She** kissed, not **His head**, but **His feet**. And **she** anointed **Him** with costly perfume, not merely everyday olive oil, as would have been expected. Such an outpouring of reverence showed how deeply **she** must have loved **her Master**.

To **Simon**, the Chief Shepherd said: **Because of this, I tell you that her sins - which are many - have been forgiven, (Greek: hoti) for this reason she loved much. Then Yeshua** turned to **her** and said: **Your sins are forgiven (Luke 7:47-48 CJB).** We can replace the word **forgiven** with *accepted* and maintain the integrity of the passage. "Those who *accept* little, **love** little." If we think **God** is harsh and unfair, guess how we'll treat others? Harshly and unfairly. But if we discover that **He** has doused us with unconditional love, would that make a difference?

Rabbi **Sha'ul** would say so! Talk about a turnaround. **He** went from a bully to a teddy bear. **Sha'ul BC (Before Christ)** sizzled with anger. **He set out to destroy the Messianic Community - entering house after house, he dragged off both men and women and handed them over to be put in prison (Acts 8:3 CJB).** But **Sha'ul AD (After Discovery)** brimmed with **love**.

His accusers beat **him**, stoned **him**, jailed **him** and mocked **him**. Yet, can you find one instance where **he** responded in kind? One temper tantrum? One angry outburst? **He** was a different man. **His** anger was gone. **His** passion was strong. **His** devotion was unquestioned. But the rash outbursts were a thing of the past. What made the difference? **Rabbi Sha'ul** had encountered **ADONAI**.⁶⁴⁶

The other guests at this feast were **Pharisees**, like **Simon**. When they heard **Christ's** declaration of forgiveness, **their** response was the same as that of the **Pharisees** who, when **Jesus** forgave the sins of the paralytic, and thought to themselves, "He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but **God alone**" (**Matthew 9:3b; Mark 2:7; Luke 5:21b**)? So here around **Simon's** table the **Pharisees** began to whisper among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins" (**Luke 7:49**)? If some today are confused about **Christ's** claim to be **God**,

those **guests** at **Simon's** home were not so inclined. **Their** response indicated that **the One** in **their** midst could only be **the Messiah**.

Jesus said to the woman: **Your faith has saved you . . . go in peace** (Luke 7:50). **The woman** went out to endure the cruel insights and heartless criticisms of men. But **she** went with **peace** in **her** heart and the assurance of **Yeshua's** loving care. **Her** **drenching His feet with her tears and wiping them with her hair, her kissing** and pouring expensive **perfume on His feet** did not save **her**. The means of **her** salvation was **faith**.

We need to ask ourselves, "Do I have friends who are **sinners**?" If I only have friends who are believers, what does that say about me? Merely being with nonbelievers is the first step in being fishers of men and **women** (see **Cj - Come, Follow Me, And I Will Make You Fishers of Men**). Then comes **love** - a heart-kindness that sees beneath the surface of their off-hand remarks and listens for the deeper cry of the soul. It asks, "Can you tell me more about that?" and follows up with compassion. There is much preaching in this friendliness. Such **love** is not a natural instinct. It comes solely from **God**.

*Lord, when I am with nonbelievers today, may I become aware of the cheerless voice, the weary face, or the downcast eyes that I, in my natural self-preoccupation, could easily overlook. May I have a **love** that springs from and is rooted in **Your love**. May I listen to others, show **Your** compassion, and speak **Your** truth today.⁶⁴⁷*