

Jesus encounters two contrasting people with two expectations of Jesus and thus two responses to Him: 1) Simon, a Pharisee who throws a banquet for Jesus, and 2) a "woman of the city, a sinner" who throws all of herself to Jesus. It is possible to overanalyze this story and miss the emotive power behind it. Read the story and see Jesus relate to these two people. See their responses to Him and His absolute worthiness of all our adoration and whatever power that we have to give. Jesus is gloriously merciful, has the authority to pronounce the forgiveness of our great and multitudinous depravities.

1. A Pharisee Judges Whether Jesus Fits His Expectations

- a. Simon seems to be truly and honestly seeking to know Jesus on some level
 - i. The fact that Simon invited Jesus over to a meal is an action of hospitality and honor
 - ii. Simon does not seem to be as vicious as some of the Pharisee party are at this point
 - iii. Simon is also bold and somewhat fearless of those in his own party
 1. He invites Jesus to a public dinner
 2. The only other example of a Pharisee seeking to know Jesus is Nicodemus (John 3), and he comes at night!
- b. Simon is of the cultural elite, powerful, capable of providing a banquet
 - i. Simon is shown as having enough resources to invite Jesus and those who follow him into his house
 1. These banquets provided a place to discuss the Scriptures, philosophy, and/or politics
 2. Simon is seeking to know where Jesus really stands and if he is truly a prophet as it was being said
 - ii. at these banquets people reclined to eat, laying on their side and leaning up on one elbow, so that their feet were extended behind them
 1. Their feet would have been far from the table, nearer the edges of the room, with sandals off
 - iii. The tables were very short, built in a "U" shape so that the servants could bring the food into the middle of the "U" and the guests arranged on the outside of the "U"
- c. the banquet was probably public, often allowing in strangers to hear the discussion/debate between members
 - i. This is how the woman got in without anybody causing a stir
 - ii. Notice that Simon's issue isn't that the woman is there, but the rather that Jesus a) isn't a prophet or he would know she was a sinner and b) if he knew she was a sinner he wouldn't let himself be tainted by her touch
- d. In the end, Simon is seeking (and even accepting him in a way) Jesus in order to see if Jesus fits into Simon's expectations of what a prophet should be.
 - i. He judged Jesus as "not a prophet" because he assumed that a prophet would a) not allow a sinner to defile him by touching him, or b) the woman touching him was a sinner
 - ii. Jesus shows him that both assumptions are wrong and that He truly is a prophet

2. The Woman Gratefully Recognizes That Jesus Has Fit Her for Himself

- a. "a woman of the city and a sinner"
 - i. contrasted with Simon the Pharisee this woman is most likely a prostitute
- b. She speaks no words in this entire passage
 - i. Talk is cheap – her actions portray the desires of her heart
- c. She brought an alabaster jar of perfume
 - i. Perfume was a luxury in the middle east, more of an aromatic ointment for the feet than merely a fragrance
 1. Something that would ease tired feet, aroma smelly feet, hydrate dry feet, etc.
 - ii. These alabaster jars had long skinny necks that kept the ointment from coming out. In order to use the ointment, you had to break the jars, rendering them useless
 1. Most women would wear these around their necks for two reasons:
 - a. To indicate their beauty and attractiveness

- i. An attractive woman and a fragrant woman was desirable
 - ii. For this woman all the power that she had in society was this physical desirability
 - b. To protect the investment from getting stolen
 - i. Often poorer people will place their wealth in some item which they can carry on their persons because they don't trust others (cell phones in Cambodia)
 - ii. This jar of ointment was everything that she had financially
 - d. Standing there with her jar of perfume, she becomes overwhelmed with emotion and starts to weep.
 - i. She began to wet his feet with her tears
 - ii. She wasn't noticed until this moment, as Jesus probably turned to look at who was weeping and what was dropping on his feet
 - e. At this humbling moment, with everyone looking at her, in an awkward moment of social faux pas, she doesn't run away, she kneels down and does something even more shocking
 - i. She lets down her hair to dry her tears and puts the ointment upon his feet
 - 1. What do these actions signify?
 - a. She gave up every financial power that she had to be used on Jesus' feet, but this was more than merely financial
 - b. She broke all that made her desirable in her culture, *all the power that she had in this world she poured out to honor* and gratefully show her love for Jesus.
 - i. A prostitute's power was in her desirability, strongly tied to this alabaster jar of aromatic ointment
 - ii. What power or capital or leverage would she have now?
 - c. She is saying to Jesus: "If you are who you say you are, then I come to you for rescue and for satisfaction and for provision and for protection, but I come to you without any power of my own and no conditions of my own. I give you everything I am and everything that I have. All my power, all my desirability, all which makes me anything or anyone is yours."
 - i. "Take my love, my Lord, I pour at your feet its treasure stored"
 - d. "Jesus, you change everything for me. You tell me what to do, how to live, love, and act. I am not my own any longer, but I belong to you and entrust myself to you and submit my life to you. I will no longer live the way that I have lived, just tell me what is good and right and worthy and I will do it."
 - ii. Rather than seeking to judge whether or not Jesus fits into her expectations of a Messiah, she sees the mercy of God and the forgiveness through Jesus and falls on her face in grateful and complete surrender to Him
 - 1. She does not demand that Jesus fit into her prophetic understanding, but she simply knows the depths of her sin, sees the forgiveness of sinners through Him, and utterly and joyfully gives him full reign over her
3. How Do You *Functionally* Believe That a Sinner Can Approach a Holy God?
- a. The woman's response is the only *rational* way, but this story begs the question of which response you are going to take.
 - b. You can respond to God in a Simon way or in this woman's way:
 - i. Simon: I want to know Jesus, to intellectually argue with him, but I don't want to change my goals. If I come to Jesus, I want the peace and the power he offers, but I don't want to change *everything*. Does that mean I'll have to give up *this*?"
 - 1. People who come to Jesus on this level come to him as a mere teacher, but not as the Christ. They have already made up their minds about what is good, holy, right, and just. They come to Jesus asking questions to make sure that he fits their system and can deliver on their dreams. Simon already "knew" what he wanted, and he didn't expect nor desire Jesus to change that.

2. These people are afraid that coming to Jesus means that everything will change, so they only come partway, on their terms. Liberals are afraid they will have to be conservative and conservatives are afraid that they will have to become liberal. Give to the poor? Walk in sexual purity?
3. To these people Jesus responds with: "come back when you're serious about taking me as I am." This is what he says to Simon. Until you know that you need EVERYTHING from him, he has nothing to offer you which you will truly accept.
- ii. Woman: *Everything* is yours, O Christ, for you have forgiven me. I have no conditions at all. *Everything* goes.

4. Who We Believe Jesus to be Determines Our Response to Him

- a. Jesus explains in a parable *why* the two people respond to him in such a way: The different responses to Jesus are because they have different understandings of Jesus.
- b. Simon does not understand his need for an absolute Savior
 - i. In the parable, there are two people who both owe money that they cannot pay back.
 - ii. It is insignificant, ultimately, what the amount of debt is when you cannot pay it back. Bankrupt is bankrupt. Total loss is total loss.
 1. If you have nothing to pay, it doesn't matter what the amount of debt is.
 2. What does this mean?
 - a. It doesn't matter what kind of life you lived! It doesn't matter if you've lived a good life, a moral life, or a wretched life and a life full of sin.
 - b. Everybody owes and no one can pay!
 - c. It's kind of like whether you die from a blood clot in your sleep or if a grizzly dismembers you and tears you limb from limb, which person is more dead?
 - iii. Simon is dead. He cannot pay, even if he only owes the 50 denarii.
 1. He doesn't get this. He wants a path, a method to follow, a game plan for his life, but he doesn't want a complete and utter savior to whom he owes everything and cannot pay back.
 2. He wants Jesus' teaching, but not him, an impersonal plan not a person because he believes that he can save himself and that his wisdom is solid.
 - iv. Jesus says that whether you are religious or a great sinner, you both need an absolute Savior.
 1. There is a bottom line of Scripture: *There is a God and you're not Him.*
 - a. Liberal/License: There is no God who holds me accountable to whom I owe anything. I am my own God so I can make my own rules. I can be a good person and my deeds of mercy and justice make me good enough.
 - b. Conservative: There is a God, but I'm Him. I am my Savior and I can save myself. I have control over my destiny by my good moral life. I control whether or not I make it to heaven.
 - c. They both are sinning, and they both are lost. One is quietly dead and the other is messily dead, but they're both dead.
- c. The difference between the two is whether or not one knows the weight of sins forgiven by Jesus
 - i. Jesus breaks down the "I'm not that bad" mentality and demands utter salvation, not partial salvation. You must see that you are as lost as the worst sinner in the world, as dead as those whose sins you perceive to be greater in both number and degree. You cannot pay and you are just as lost and are no different.
 - ii. Jesus also shows that there is a cost, a debt involved in sin and in forgiveness.
 1. Forgiveness is debt payment by the offended and not by the offender. This woman got it! She knew she was the debtor and that she couldn't pay. She knew she was totally dead and needed a life-giving Savior from outside of herself. She needed a debt payment made by God.
 2. The only way for anyone to know God and have forgiveness is for Jesus to make that payment for you. This is why Jesus can pronounce forgiveness to people in the gospels. He knows the Cross is coming. He is already walking the path the Father

has set before Him, so every pronouncement of forgiveness is made in the light of his future sin-bearing, debt-paying, Cross-dying, work. In the words of David Wells:

"He went to the cross freely, in fulfillment of His Messianic vocation, and it was with this purpose in mind that he offered forgiveness to fallen sinners even before he had gone to the cross. His actions, in this regard, had an implied Christological significance, for who can forgive sin but God alone?"

5. How is Your Heart Responding to Jesus Now?

- a. Why are you not "letting your hair down" and ripping all that you have away from your heart and weeping tears of gratitude and love for God? Why is your religion dry and dead and impersonal? Because you don't really understand the depths of the cost which God paid to forgive you and have a personal relationship with you!
- b. Many of us *say* that we have a deeply personal relationship with God (or are "spiritual"), but we live and act like Simon, not this woman:
 - i. Where's the blood, the thorns, the death, the agony of your God?
 1. "He doesn't need to do all that to have a relationship with me."
 - ii. Because we don't *feel* the severity and the weight of our mutinous actions and our self-centered hearts.
 1. That is why you don't love him like the woman loved Jesus.
 2. That is why there are no tears, no shameless expressions of love that lets its hair down.
 3. That is why you are so concerned with what others think of you and are controlled by fear and anxiety and depression.
 4. *You don't get how deep God's love goes because you are denying the great debt which you could not pay.* That's why there is no joy. That is why there is no power. That is why there is no transformation.
 - iii. You have a Simon religion: academic and ethical, but not truly personal if it lacks giving everything and submitting everything with tears of joy and grateful hair-lowering worship of the heart.
- c. Because the two responses and the two understandings, they each get what they're looking for:
 - i. Simon receives what he was looking for:
 1. a seminar, a case study, a parable. That is all he got.
 2. An academic experience and a Tuesday with Jesus of Nazareth across the table, separated from the Divine King by wood and the empty hollow of the "U".
 - ii. But the woman! She gets:
 1. An ability to love that she didn't have before
 - a. From the bartered "love" of prostitution and the loneliness thereof to the power to love much because she has understood the love of God in Christ Jesus and depended upon him.
 - i. The second clause: "He who has been forgiven little loves little" helps explain the first clause on forgiveness. "She has been forgiven much because she loved much." Without the 2nd statement, it appears that it was the intensity and the perfection of her love which purchases her forgiveness, which is misleading.
 - ii. The love that is expressed is firmly and foundationally grounded in understanding how much one has been loved.
 1. The reason that she even has the ability to love like this is because she sees and *believes* that God has forgiven her through Jesus.
 2. This is a remarkable principle: Your ability to love people and to rejoice in this life is completely due to how deeply you see your own sin and how deeply you see yourself to be forgiven by God's grace.

- iii. If you don't see yourself to be a truly lost, hopeless, without God in the world kind of sinner, and a completely forgiven sinner by the grace of God, you will not be able to love God truly or others fully.
 - 1. Example: what happens when somebody cheats you?
 - a. If you don't see yourself as a terrible non-debt-paying sinner, and a completely forgiven non-debt-paying sinner, you won't be able to truly forgive and love that person, working for their joy.
 - b. But when you do, then you'll be too humble to hold a grudge (you're a great sinner) and you'll be too joyful to hold a grudge (you've been forgiven!)
 - 2. The confidence of forgiveness from God and peace with Him and through Him
 - a. "Your faith has saved you." Past tense! Not "your faith will save you" but rather that she is already saved because she trusted in Jesus, surrendering everything to him in hope.
 - b. "Go into peace" - Live the life of peace, the joy of peace, walking the road before you because you are surrounded by peace with God.
- iii. The more you see your debt and its depravity and the more you see His love and its sufficiency the more you'll be able to let down your hair, surrender to Christ Jesus, and open your whole life to him and trust in his words, the more you will walk in peace, without fear of what people think of you and without fear of what can be taken from you for Christ Jesus is your Savior and your Beloved and the more you will walk into this peace.

What Shall We Do About Our Own Hardened Hearts?

- 1. "Look at this woman!"
 - a. It is not the powerful, but the marginal that show us what faith is really like.
- 2. If you are having trouble loving (God, people, enemies, life), it is within your power to do something about it. You have forgotten your debt. You have minimized it, justified it, forgotten the debt which you owed and which you cannot pay.
 - a. How shall you grow in love?
 - b. Look at your sin in all its ugliness and then behold your merciful Savior in all His glorious grace and let the majesty of His great forgiveness rip that alabaster jar off your neck as you sing to him with all your heart, Take My Life and Let it Be Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.