

The dinner (36-38)

The setting (36)

A Pharisee by the name of Simon invited Jesus into his home. We do not know what the motivation for this invitation was – whether to win respect, or just a cultural expectation. But we know that he doesn't treat Jesus as he would any other house guest. Jesus' feet are not washed – to clean off the filthy (animal excrement etc.) but were left embarrassingly dirty; Jesus was not greeted with the customary kiss – placing his hand on the shoulder and giving the kiss of peace; and dinner guests were anointed with a touch of olive oil.

The home that Simon stayed in was most probably built around a central courtyard in which the formal meals were served. The guests would recline at table on the left elbow with your feet extended away from the table. The door of your home would also stay open during the meal. Other uninvited guests could come in and sit on the outskirts to observe the conversation.

The intrusion (37-38)

This lady, whose name we do not know, is one of these uninvited guests. But she gets a bit close. She has a reputation that preceded her (in a bad way) – probably a prostitute. It was like there was a deathly hush that fell over the room as everyone watched her walk up to the table – people were whispering and stared with condescending looks. But at some point in Jesus ministry, perhaps at a public sermon, she had responded in her heart to the promise of forgiveness in Christ. Her hands quivered and her eyes filled with tears she broke open the jar and pour out its contents and her tears over Christ's feet.

She was filled with gratitude, but also sorrow at seeing the way that Simon was treating her Lord. What she poured on his feet was worth about a year's wages (you can do the maths). She didn't have a towel so she loosed her hair and wiped his feet. This only added to the socially unacceptable moment. A woman only loosened her hair for her husband and according to Jewish custom it fell in the same category as uncovering the breasts. As the beautiful aroma filled the room she kissed his feet.

The discussion (39-43)

The thought (39)

Simon demotes Jesus in his own mind, 'how can this man even be a prophet if he allows this sinful woman touch him.' But ironically in verse 40 Jesus reads his mind – he knows what Simon was saying to himself!

It is clear that Simon cannot see past this woman's sin. He would just love to kick this woman back from the table and have his servants throw her out. He can't stand her in his presence. He can only see her past record of sin. He can see what Christ does.

The parable (40-43)

So Jesus tells a parable! There are two debtors: one owes about two month salary the other owes about two years salary. And neither is able to make the payment to the debt collector. So instead of throwing them into prison, or extorting the debt by some other means, he amazingly forgives the debt. And Jesus asks: 'which man will love him more'. And Simon gives the 'right' answer.

The difference (44-50)

Jesus then proceeds to reveal Simon's heart to himself. He compares the actions of the sinful woman and Simon. She is the one who washed his feet – with tears; she is the one who anointed him with oil – costly perfume; she is the one who kissed him – on his feet! Simon is a horrible host and she has done more than any host could ever be expected to do. And this all shows how much she loves Christ and how much she understands her forgiveness (47). Simon probably considers himself to be a 'little sinner'

Application

Let's draw this story into our stories and see what it means.

1. Jesus loves sinners

The Pharisee's desire for purity separated them from interaction with the world. They kept 'sinners' at arm's length. But when you look at Jesus you see a holy, righteous man who preaches against sin, yet does not isolate himself. The point is that the light must be in the darkness to shine. But how would you feel if some you knew to be a notorious sinner was at Jesus' feet?

Wouter Bason or Lady Gaga.

It is easy to protest, 'surely not I Lord' but (1) how is it that Christianity has earned the reputation of being high and mighty and arrogant. (2) Do we willingly associate with sinners, or do

we prefer the clean comfortable company of our Christian community? Apparently, as soon as the first two years of someone becoming a Christian, they largely dissociate from their previous circle of friends. (3) And worst of all – we unwittingly send the opposite message from what God called us to do. We are meant to be a bridge to a relationship with God, but we become a blockage.

Do we not HAVE to ask the question: why were those outside of the faith (tax collectors, prostitutes and other ‘sinners’) so drawn to Christ? What was it about HIM that drew them to his message?

- (A) Be friendly to visitors; (B) DON’T cut yourself off from friendships with non-Christians, in fact pursue them; (C) Live an attractive life.

2. Much forgiven, much love

Let me tell you the one thing that will equip you to do this! You need to understand your position in Christ as saved sinners. It appears that the conclusion of the parable is that: if you are a really bad sinner before you become a Christian then you will really love Jesus a lot, but if you were a little sinner then you will only love Jesus a little. But if you think this is true then we need to revise our strategy: “Before you become a Christian go out and be a lying, cheating stealing, wife-beating, philanderer. Abuse some elderly folk and rob a bank. Then you’ll really be a good Christian!” No, surely not! But then what is he saying?

It is when you recognise your own sinfulness and the greatness of God’s gift of salvation that you will love much. In other words: if you think, ‘I just needed a little help from Jesus; a little push over the finishing line; I was pretty good person and just needed a little righteousness top up from Christ – then you will only love a little. BUT if you believe (correctly) that any and all sin separated us from God; that it is not even particularly about the individual sin(s) that you have committed but rather that, in any way you have broken the perfect law of God you are lost; that you are actually a sinner by nature (i.e. it comes naturally out of you) and because of that you are under the judgement, the wrath of God!

The NSRI Illustration...

And that is what the Bible says clearly, over and over again. Just one example: in Romans 3:23 it says (I’ll give you a paraphrase) “All have sinned and fall woefully and hopelessly and completely short of the perfect standards of God’s glory. And therefore all are under judgement – the **p**rostitute and the **p**etty thief, the **p**rroud and the **p**erverse.

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Scripture: Luke 7:36-50

You have got to get that sorted out in your head. There is nothing good in you that makes God favourably disposed to you; but freely, by his grace alone he opened the way of salvation in Christ, he even opens our eyes to see the truth of it. Eph 2:8-9

Here is the point: if you're sitting here this morning like the Pharisees: 'I am a pretty good person, the goodness in my life overcomes my sin and God will accept me for that' then you are actually worse off than the prostitute: 'I'm hopelessly lost, my ONLY hope is Christ' – because the Pharisee is blind to their need, the prostitute is aware! If you were the goody-two-shoes growing up, if you grew up in and around the church – this is your battle!

When you realise that you are completely, utterly, without hope or recourse lost in your sin – then you will love MUCH (not on account of your kinds of sins) because you are a sinner saved by grace.

3. Boldness of this sinner

It is difficult to relate to the social pressure that this lady overcomes, but you need to see her bravery and boldness in approaching Christ like she did. She literally counted the cost, stood up and claimed her faith. She knew deep in her heart what she believed and she followed her heart.

Conclusion

If you are not a Christian and you are here this morning – let me encourage you to think: are you a sinner and is Christ the Saviour you need. If so be bold and brave and claim him as your own!

If you are Christian – you also need to be bold and brave. It is sometimes not easy to maintain friendships with non-Christians, your position may be challenged, you will feel uncomfortable at times and people will look at you with social disdain. Remember who you love and why!