

Jesus Loves the Pharisees Too, Part 1

Luke 7:39-43

I'd like to invite you to turn in your Bibles to Luke 7:36. Jesus has here been invited to dinner by a Pharisee, one of those Pharisees, those are the deeply religious, socially respectable men of the time in Jerusalem who, as Luke 7:30 tells us, Don't be fooled by what you see on the surface, they rejected the purpose of God for themselves.

So while they looked good on the outside and while they were respectable and erudite and educated and studied, they were also set against the purpose of God for themselves. And Jesus, though, accepted this invitation to eat at this man's house. They all reclined at the table there to eat. And as they did, there appeared, as the text says, "Behold, there appeared there a notoriously sinful woman." She showed up and she was known in the city as a sinner. What's interesting about this woman, though, is that something had affected her. Something had

changed her. She was not the same woman that they had known. That became evident by her behavior that day.

The woman, having discovered that Jesus would be dining at the Pharisee's house that day, she came to worship Jesus Christ. She came with an alabaster flask of ointment in her hand, and she came there to worship him, to anoint his feet with that perfumed ointment. As she entered into that house and came and approached that dinner table, the low table where they would all lie around the table, their feet extended away from the table, relaxing, there around the table to converse, to eat, to share fellowship. Here comes this woman.

She entered into the company of Pharisees. They were a scowling, critical spirited people. All they could see when she approached is unclean. It's all they could see is her sin. There she comes in boldness. She carried out this kind act of humble worship, ignoring the scorn. Looking past all of that, she drops to the feet of Jesus Christ, the one who forgave her of all of her sins.

With that in mind, let's read the passage starting in Luke 7:36. "One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with ointment.

"Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.' And Jesus answering said to him, 'Simon, I have something to say to you.' And he answered, 'Say it, Teacher.'

"A certain money lender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, the other fifty. And when they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?' Simon answered, 'The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.' And he said to him, 'You have judged

rightly.’ Then turning to 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. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.’ And he said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’

“Then those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this, who even forgives sins?’ And he said to the woman, ‘Your faith has saved you; go in peace.’” That is such a remarkable passage. This is the only place in Scripture it is recorded. And I’m so grateful for its inclusion in the canon, aren’t you?

This woman is overwhelmed by God’s grace. Her heart is full of love and joy and thankfulness and all she wants to do is bow at the feet of Jesus Christ to offer worship and praise and gratitude. What else has she to give but that?

And frankly, as we've been going through the narrative, this woman is like a breath of fresh air. For every true believer, we recognize this woman is a sister. She's like a cool breeze coming across this hostile dinner table. Because finally, here, someone is giving Jesus his due praise. Amid this growing tension in Luke's Gospel surrounding Jesus and his ministry, here's someone recognizing him for who he is, someone who's worshiping him as his glory deserves. And it's a joyful relief for all of us who read the text with believing eyes and believing hearts.

Now, we pointed this out last time, as well. We noted here at this point that Jesus did not pull his feet away. It's interesting that he is pleased actually to allow this sinner, this forgiven sinner to worship at his feet. Only one person in the world, only one person throughout all of history, or who will ever be in the future, only one person in the world for whom that kind of worship is appropriate and it's Jesus Christ, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords. Only he.

And one day, everyone, every woman and every man, old and young alike, king and slave and everyone in between, one day “at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” One day, we’ll all have the same view that that woman had looking at his feet above us.

Now for this Pharisee, the host, for his table full of guests and for all those who had rejected the purpose of God for themselves, who did not receive Jesus as the Christ, this little interruption had to be a pretty unsettling experience for them. Some may have smirked at the kind of followers that Jesus attracted. Yeah, look at her. That’s all he can get, that kind of person. Some may have scorned. Some may have been, frankly, offended to see how this rabbi, this teacher, accepted this kind of behavior. Teacher, get a hold of your student! Get her out of here!

But we as believing readers, as those who would eagerly line up behind this woman to follow her example in bowing at the feet of Jesus Christ, what seems strange to us in this narrative

is that Jesus' first interaction is not with this woman. He doesn't talk to our sister, a fellow redeemed sinner, this former sinner turned saint. His first interaction is with the Pharisee. And he turns and tells that dismissive, rude, ungracious man a story and he teaches him about love.

The woman is clearly a sympathetic character here, not the Pharisee. The Pharisee has been rather insulting to our Savior, as we read. But the woman has honored him, bowing at his feet, washing, and anointing his feet. She's got it right. Shouldn't Jesus turn directly to her and away from the Pharisee? But he doesn't do that. Jesus first addresses the Pharisee, this hard-hearted, proud-minded sinner who seems to be this woman's polar opposite in so many ways. He's a man, she's a woman. He's wealthy, she's likely rather poor. He's got the respect and admiration of the whole community, but she's scorned and laughed at.

Why doesn't Jesus get up from this table, walk out of the Pharisee's home, turn his back to those people, leave the arrogant to themselves and take this woman with him together exclusively with his disciples in protest against the evil

social status quo that props up arrogant men like that? So what are we seeing here?

Folks, in this text, Jesus is setting an example for us of what it means to love our enemies. We wouldn't do that. We'd want to see the Pharisee get his due. Jesus doesn't do that. This Pharisee is purely an unsympathetic figure. He treated, he's treated our Lord and Savior in such an insulting manner. He's critical-minded, critical-spirited, censorious in his judgments. And what does Jesus do? He practices what he preached and loves this man. Luke 6:27, he taught us, "But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you."

Not everyone can hear that word. Probably every single one of us in here has had a critical spirit toward somebody else. We've had a censorious judgment. We've looked down upon people. We shouldn't always identify with the sinful woman and say, Yeah, that's the way I am, humble all the time. No, no we're not. A lot of times in social settings, we're rather like the Pharisee. We want to be in the accepted crowd. We're man-pleasers. We fear men. We want their respect. We want to be viewed as dignified and uplifted in society. We really need to



put ourselves in this text where he is and thank God that Jesus humbles himself to that kind of sinner, as well.

Not everyone can hear this word: Love your enemies. It's only those who have ears to hear who are able to hear and understand. It's only those with a heart to believe, with a desire to obey. Only they will look to God and find spiritual power within them by the Holy Spirit to do what is really humanly impossible. This kind of love, we don't have it. It's not in us. In this text with this hostile Pharisee, Jesus is going to show us how to love our enemies. He has loved his enemies. What about us? How will we live coming out of this text?

After the woman enters and, frankly, makes a scene in verses 36-38, the narrative then draws our attention to the reaction of the Pharisee. Here's what he was thinking about, about what just happened in front of him. "Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.'"

Now, notice here that the Pharisee's pondering isn't about the woman. He's got her all figured out. She is neatly pigeonholed and tucked away in the unclean category. She's a sinner. No more thought necessary. Don't need to ponder anything. As a non-entity to him, her behavior at his dinner party, while slightly embarrassing, he can get over it. It's ultimately a nonissue. She'll be shooed away by the servants eventually. This guy's moving on.

Instead, the Pharisee's focus and his thinking is on Jesus. Jesus is the object of his perplexity. Jesus is the one that he intended to invite there and discredit in the first place. And now, crystallizing in his unbelieving mind, he lands on the evidence that he came looking for in the first place, Aha! Exactly as I suspected, Jesus is no prophet. Now, before we parse his thinking, we just need to notice how Luke has given us some clues here in the text about what we're going to see in this thinking. Luke is setting us up here by how he introduces the thought life of this man to discern the Pharisee's heart, to see the blackness of his heart, to judge his thinking even

before we hear the concluding judgment that he's made about Jesus.

Notice, first that Luke has reminded us that the Pharisee invited Jesus. We already knew that, right? I mean from the opening verse, verse 36, we already knew he invited him, so why this reminder just two verses later? We noted last week the Pharisees had rejected the purpose of God for themselves, Luke 7:30. So we need to carry forward this bit of information into this scene, that the one who invited him is not here offering friendship. This man is hostile to Jesus. He doubted Jesus from the start and he's merely looking for evidence to support that predetermined conclusion. So Jesus has stepped into an intellectual religious ambush. The Pharisee intends to prove in the presence of all his dinner guests, he intends to prove that this Jesus is no prophet at all.

Second, and look again in verse 39 where Luke tells us, "Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this." Saw what? What did he see? The Pharisee witnessed what everyone else did, that an infamous woman has come to worship Jesus. She came to them with the sole purpose of humbling herself, bowing at his

feet and anointing him with oil. The outpouring of emotion that preceded the outpouring of perfumed ointment, that really only strengthens the remarkable nature of what has happened to this woman. And he saw this.

Okay, so yeah, duh, why is that important? Because we need to see that the Pharisee's conclusion has completely ignored this important piece of evidence. The Pharisee has totally dismissed as unimportant, as irrelevant the inexplicable and dramatic turn around by a woman that he knew, a woman that everyone knew, was a sinful woman. Not one thought about her change of heart. Not one mention of her humble and reverent and worshipful behavior, which is nothing less than a radical transformation. Doesn't this seem just a bit odd that all this Pharisee wants to consider is the kind of evidence that might prove Jesus is a fake?

So he's ignored the obvious. And he's assumed what he's wanting to prove. This Pharisee is hostile to Jesus. He's invited him to dinner to put him to the test. He's witnessed a dramatic transformation. But he seems blind to it. He's ignored its significance. Third thing we find out here, just to bring us

into his thought life, as Luke tells us in verse 39, this conclusion that we're reading about is something that, quote, "he said to himself." That is to say, these words were not spoken. They were not audible. He didn't speak these things out loud. What we're reading here are the thoughts of his mind.

Okay, why is that important? What does that tell us? Well, besides the obvious fact that all of our thoughts are known to God, as this man's thoughts are known to God, and his thoughts are put on the pages of Scripture, we're glad that the canon's closed, aren't we? But besides that obvious fact, think about what it means that he's thinking one thing and he's not talking according to that. He's not treating Jesus that way. This man is not acting in a straightforward manner with Jesus Christ. He's not honest and forthright. This man is duplicitous. He speaks with a forked tongue. He upholds Jesus. He invites him, pretending friendship and fellowship, but he withholds his true thoughts, his true intentions. He gives Jesus the false impression of friendship, of agreement, of favor. All the while, he wants to roast him.

So Luke wants us to consider what we're about to hear from the Pharisee's mind, his judgment. He wants us to consider it in light of all that. This man has an axe to grind. He's only interested in reinforcing his own judgment with evidence that he intended to find at that dinner. And now with this unexpected and uninvited guest who came in weeping at Jesus' feet, now he finds an opportunity to capitalize on that intrusion, to find some reason to reject Jesus and that's just what he does. "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner."

Again, this Pharisee has already determined Jesus is not a prophet. That's his starting assumption. So it's like this, "If this man were a prophet," but he's most certainly not a prophet, "he would know that this woman is a sinner. He doesn't know what kind of woman is touching him," which now proves what I've already assumed, namely, "he's not a prophet." What kind of proof does he think he's found? Why does the Pharisee assume that Jesus does not know who and what sort of woman this is that she's a sinner? Here is his irrefutable proof, just one piece of evidence, the woman is touching Jesus and he's allowing it.

So when this sinful woman entered, when she started touching Jesus' feet, immediately the Pharisees honed in on that. Notes that violation of purity. He spots the defilement. He's got radar, just points right to it. After all, here's a woman who's frequented the marketplace in the interests of her illicit profession. No telling where this woman has been recently but its certain she's been in the marketplace, probable she's been in the company of unclean Gentiles, and very likely, she's been up to no good at all, involved in yet another sin. This woman is unclean to the core. Simon doesn't want her to get any nearer. The very presence of this notoriously sinful woman means the dinner table is at risk of defilement by an impure, ritually unclean person.

What are the errors in his reasoning, which have led him to such a false and censorious judgment about Jesus Christ? Again, back to the clues that Luke gave us when introducing the Pharisee's thoughts. First, the Pharisee's conclusion, it's based on prejudicial thinking. He is biased against Jesus. He's hostile to Jesus from the start. That's how his heart is oriented and so he's determined to find something wrong. He starts with his conclusion and then he goes looking for proof.

His thinking is not neutral. It's blinded by prejudice. And just, beloved, I just stepping out from the text, every unbeliever you find, the heart is prejudice against God. The heart is prejudice against righteousness. The thinking is not neutral. It's morally set against God. That's what the Bible tells us.

What else do we see here? Second, very important to notice that because of his prejudicial thinking, the Pharisee has demonstrated two very significant errors in judgment. On the one hand, he assumes this, he assumes that Jesus doesn't know who and what kind of woman has been touching him. And on the other hand, the Pharisee thinks that he does know what kind of woman she is, that she's a sinner. As we pointed out, though, Pharisee's just witnessed here something utterly remarkable, that this woman, known to all as an arrogant, obdurate, wayward sinner.

She's now humbling bowing at Jesus' feet. She's reverent, she's shedding tears. She's sincere. She's using the hair of her head as a common rag to wipe up his dirty feet and dry them. She sacrifices her expensive perfume. Wait a minute. Isn't she going



to need that perfume for a job later on? No. She gives it here. What's happened to her? That's called contrary evidence. That is evidence that his conclusions about the woman might need to be reconsidered. Does this Pharisees really know better than Jesus? Does he know who and what sort of woman has been touching Jesus? Or is Jesus maybe the better judge of that?